

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS HEAD COACH BILL BELICHICK
PRESS CONFERENCE
January 12, 2007**

BB: We're kind of winding it down here. This is a tough day to finish up with San Diego, with their red area offense. They're, by far and away, the best team in the league in the red area. They do it all pretty good. They almost never get stopped down there. We're going to have our hands full with that one. We're winding it down. We'll leave after practice here and get everything sown up here this afternoon and get out to San Diego.

Q: Any adjustments to your routine because of the early trip?

BB: No. We'll have a normal Friday today, and then, instead of going home, we'll just get on the plane. Tomorrow will be a normal Saturday. It will be about as much of a normal road trip as we could make it, other than traveling Saturday afternoon. We'll just be there tomorrow.

Q: Was there a thinking to leaving earlier? Is it just to get acclimated because it's a long trip?

BB: Well, it's a one o'clock game on Sunday. If it were a night game, maybe we would do it differently. I don't think we want to travel all day there Saturday and then get up early and play the next day.

Q: Will you have use of a facility out there?

BB: We might go to the stadium. We'll talk about that and see what it looks like out there.

Q: Shawne Merriman was saying that he has seen a lot of different blocking schemes. Do you notice teams throughout the course of the season have tried to do different things to slow him down?

BB: Sure. Well, I think you could say that about every team. I think over the course of the year, you're going to see tight ends staying in. Backs staying in. Lines sliding to you. Both backs coming at you in play action. Both backs going away and the tight end staying in. I can't imagine any 3-4 team, any outside linebacker, not seeing all of those combinations through the course of the year. He's definitely seen them, but that's what the teams do in the NFL.

Q: What kind of matchup nightmare is Antonio Gates?

BB: Yes, it's tough. It's tough. He gets on a defensive back and he has a size advantage. He gets on a linebacker and most of the time he has a speed and quickness advantage. No matter who is on him, he has tremendous ball skills. He has great ability to position his body to where he kind of boxes out the defender, almost like rebounding a basketball, and he has terrific hands, so he can extend his hands away from his body and make those catches and just kind of box the guy out behind him or in front of him. Once he gets position, he can hold that position and the quarterback puts the ball on the other side of the defender and you just can't get it. He's tough to cover. Yes, he's really tough to cover.

Q: Looking at film, is there anything that you've seen, any one way, that teams have been able to slow him down, any one coverage that seems to work?

BB: Well, if you double him, it just squeezes the space off. He makes some catches against double coverage too. Anytime there's one guy on him, whether it's man or zone, whichever side

the defender is on, or whether he's in front of him or behind him, you have the other side of the defender. Now I wouldn't say anybody has just taken care of him. Sometimes the defender comes in and makes a play on the ball. He doesn't catch every one of them, but he catches a bunch of them, and he's tough in the red area. He's very good down there too.

Q: Is that one of the things that makes them tough in the red area?

BB: Absolutely. Yes. They run it in. They throw it in. They do some different things down there, like go unbalanced line and stuff like that. Their receivers are good. [Keenan] McCardell. [Eric] Parker. [Vincent] Jackson is a big target down there. Gates is a big target. They toss it up there to those guys and they come down with it on fades and posts. In one-on-one situations, they do it like Gates, I'm not saying they're as good as Gates, but they're good at getting position on the defender. [Philip] Rivers puts the ball where only his guy can get it. A lot of times they get it.

Q: I know Nick [Saban] recruited him to Michigan State when he was in high school. Was there any connection there where you guys took a look at him before the Chargers got him? Can you remember?

BB: No, I personally didn't. No.

Q: Had you heard anything about him? Was there any buzz around the league about him at all or was it just one of those under the radar things?

BB: I don't know all the details of how that all transpired. You get to the guys that are drafted, that's 250 guys, and then there's probably another 1,000 guys beyond that who are scouted in one way or another. I don't have knowledge of every single one of those guys. No. Clearly that was a great evaluation and vision by A.J. [Smith] and whoever was involved in that. Those guys did a great job of finding that player. Obviously he's developed into one of the top tight ends in the league. You have to give them a lot of credit for their vision and their development of the player.

Q: Do you typically look at least a few non-football players every year?

BB: If we think they're good enough. Believe me, I could show you 1,000 tapes a year of guys who send in stuff, 'I can play. I was great in high school flag football. This Thursday league that I play in...' we get 1,000 of those, maybe more than that. Are there any of them out there? More than we have time to deal with.

Q: Does somebody actually look at all of them?

BB: Yes. I'm telling you, some of those are just classics. The guy has his girlfriend out there throwing passes to him. He's the receiver. I ran a 3.8 in high school. You can imagine. You can imagine.

Q: When you looked at [Stephen] Neal, and he was a wrestler, were there certain things from wrestling, like hands, things like that, that made you say this guy might be a good lineman?

BB: Well, I think when you look at wrestlers, typically you see a guy with good balance. Of course strength and leverage is a part of it. You have to have leverage as a wrestler. You can't really be an upright kind of top-heavy guy or you're not going to be a very good wrestler. Being able to bend your knees and play with a low base and be able to get tossed and stay on your

feet and all of that, a wrestler would do. There's a lot of players in football and the NFL that have background in high school or college wrestling. Again, I think that's a testament to their balance and their lower body strength and their ability to stay on their feet. Now that doesn't mean they're a good football player, but it does mean they do have elements of that and that's part of inline play. It's sort of hard to teach. You work on it, but a guy just can naturally do it or has a lot of experience with it, like wrestlers do. They can toss, but they're able to drop their weight, lower their center of gravity, stay on their feet and balance up. A lot of that is inline play on the offensive and defensive line of scrimmage.

Q: Would it be wrong to say that wrestling actually helped him work in space the way he has, maybe be able to engage a blocker on the edge and everything else?

BB: I think it's helped him more in close quarters, like in pass protection and how defensive linemen try to toss the offensive linemen off of them to get to the quarterback. It's helped him more there than out in space. He is a good athlete, but his instinctiveness as a screen blocker is something that he's had to work hard on. That's not a skill that you learn, I don't think anywhere, other than running screens in football. Like I said, in pass protection, if you have a guy on you, and he tries to throw you off, that's a wrestling move. They try to work their leverage on you and try to get under your pads and take you down and wrestle you or stand you up in football, that's another skill that a good wrestler knows how to bend his knees and drop his bottom, and play with a good base so he can't get thrown from side to side. That's true of defensive linemen too. It's the same thing. Offensive guys trying to do that to them. I think there's some carryover there.

Q: Is this one of those fields where there's still dirt from baseball?

BB: I think they re-sodded. It looks like it's, just on a film, patched together a little bit. I think they might have re-sodded the middle and I think they re-sodded, it looks like, the helmet area in there. I'm not sure exactly. I think the baseball field was definitely part of it. I'm not sure exactly how that whole thing is put together. So that's one of the things that we'll want to definitely take a look at.

Q: Do you get a feel from watching their home games, I know their kicker hasn't missed there in a while, but have you seen it affect the kicking game at all?

BB: He hasn't missed anywhere. I think that we need to be aware of the footing. I'm not saying it's bad. I've seen guys slip on the field. You see guys slip on a good field sometimes too. I don't have enough familiarity with it, but I think it's one of the things that's just part of our preparations. It's one of the things that we need to look at and make sure that we have the proper footing and proper shoes, and also, more importantly, play with good body control and balance.

Q: How has the offensive line improved since the second half of the season?

BB: I think the more any group works together, the better they do together. I think our line has been consistent, really, for most of the year. There's always plays and there's things in the game that could be better, and it's certainly not perfect. I'm not saying that. Through the course of the year, from the running game [standpoint], there's been a level of consistency through the course of the year. Like I said, it hasn't always been perfect, but it's been consistent through the course of the year. Pass protection has too. That's not saying it couldn't be better.

Q: How did Steve Neal come to your attention?

BB: He was a world-class wrestler and he decided not to wrestle anymore. When he did that, his name came to us through a couple of different contacts, that he would be interested in playing football, and he played it in junior high school. It was over the summer, so we worked him out over the summer. Physically, he had a good workout. He was a good looking athlete and could run and had really natural size. There are some guys that put on a lot of weight through lifting and strengthening and all of that. Steve is just a big, strong kid. Not that he doesn't lift weights and all that, but he has a lot of natural size and strength too. We saw that there were some things to like. He's a smart kid. He has a really good work ethic, which we knew that from this training and experience as a wrestler, just his competitiveness and his toughness and his work ethic and all that. He just had a long way to go as a football player. That's kind of how it got started.

Q: A couple of weeks ago, you were asked about players that you picked up in the middle of the season that went on to be impact players. Does Artrell [Hawkins] fall into that category?

BB: Definitely. Absolutely. He came in a tough situation last year. He came in as a corner and then we moved him to safety. I think that was something that Dean [Pees] kind of saw and suggested. As it turned out, it was a great move, both for him and us. There were a couple of times where he had to go back outside as a corner, kind of in an emergency situation, but I think that he's had a good season this year inside. At this point in his career anyway, I can't speak to when he came out, because he did play corner and played it very competitively in this league, but at this point in his career, I think that safety is probably his best position. He's done a great job for us and he's made the transition, I've had a few guys that have done it, but I think he's done it about as well as anybody has, going back to Everson Walls and guys like that along the way that have gone from outside to inside.

Q: What about the Patriots play, what about their attributes makes you really confident? What makes you like their chances in this upcoming game?

BB: Why do I like their chances?

Q: Well, we talked a lot about what San Diego has and how they're great, but what about our team makes the fans watching think...why are you confident that our team will win on Sunday?

BB: Well, we're going to prepare for this game just like we do for all the rest of them. We'll go and try to do the things that we do best and try to matchup against San Diego to try to gain whatever advantages we can. I think we have a lot of good players and I think that they'll do everything they can to play their best against another good football team. Hopefully we can play better against them than we did the last time. It will certainly take more than that.

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January 11, 2007**

BB: Good morning. What are you working on?

Q: Could you just comment on Andre Tippett and the player he was and being in the finals for the Hall of Fame?

BB: Congratulations to Andre for getting to the point that he is at. I never had the opportunity to coach Andre. Being a defensive coach for the Giants for all of those years, we never really played against him, we just saw him on film. He was a big force out there on the left side, the defensive end left side. He was hard to block. A great pass rusher. Physical. Tough. Dependable. Durable guy. It was always fun to watch him and some of the other outside linebackers that were in the league at that time when most teams were going to the 3-4, as we were, and that's what we played. So you always watch some of those 3-4 teams, New England being one of them. Andre was impressive and they had [Don] Blackmon on the other side. They had good linebackers up here.

Q: There is a report out there that Rodney [Harrison] has a partially torn MCL and is going to miss the remainder of the playoffs. Is injured/reserve a consideration at this point?

BB: I think we've given all the injury information we're giving out this week. We'll have another report for you today.

Q: How tough is [Mike] Vrabel?

BB: He's pretty tough. Mike is a pretty tough kid, physically and mentally. He's a hard-nosed football player. He's always been like that. College. Pittsburgh. Here. I think he's the old-school type of kid.

Q: Being this is the second time around, how has he done making the move back inside?

BB: I think it was easier the second time around. At least he had been through it all and experienced some of the harder plays that you get in there, plays like bootlegs and play action and some of the misdirection runs and stuff like that, they're a problem even if you're an experienced linebacker, but when you're moving in there and you're getting the regular stuff down and then you start getting the misdirection and play action passes and bootlegs and stuff like that, that makes it harder. At least he's been through it. He's experienced those plays and it comes back to him. Still, it's a transition. I'm not saying that. I think having done it once we've gotten some of that stuff out of the way.

Q: Do you ever envision Scott Pioli getting a job he can't refuse and could you just talk about his value to the organization?

BB: I think you would have to ask Scott those questions. I wouldn't comment on his personal and professional situation. I think that's his business. I feel the same way about everybody else on our staff. Scott has done a great job. I've been with Scott a longtime, a few organizations. He works hard. He's well prepared. He does his job. Very team oriented. Understands the big picture. He's unselfish in what he does in his role for this team.

Q: How about the training staff and the job they've done this year just getting guys ready to play?

BB: It's good. It's a good group. Jim [Whalen] has done a great job, and his two assistants, Joe [Van Allen] and Dave [Granito], they're awesome. I think everybody in the organization has a lot of respect for that group. They work hard. They're very knowledgeable. They're up to date on the latest stuff. We utilize a lot of different resources in terms of treating players. Each guy kind of has his own area that he's probably, I don't want say specialty, because they all do everything, but some guys really work in certain areas, with certain players, or certain injuries, and that type of thing. I think they do an awesome job. They get them back out there quick. They keep them as healthy as they can. I think all of the players and coaches and the people in the organization have an awful lot of respect for that group, the hours that they put in and the knowledge that they have.

Q: Do the treatments increase at this time of year?

BB: I think you pretty much have the same procedure all the way through the year. If the guy has an injury, you want him to get it treated whether it's in September, October or January. Do you have more bumps and bruises in January than you do in September? You quite possibly could, not necessarily, but you certainly could. They keep pretty busy, though, unfortunately. We'd like to see them work less, but they keep pretty busy.

Q: What problems do [Shaun] Phillips and [Shawne] Merriman present that other outside linebackers don't?

BB: I think just about all outside linebackers in a 3-4 defense are pretty good pass rushers, that's why they play the position, and those guys are. Whether it's the Jets, Pittsburgh, any of the 3-4 teams you play. That's part of the job description for that position, the outside linebacker, have some pass rush ability out there, whether it's speed or power or a combination of quickness or however they do it, then it's blocking those individual pass rush techniques that those players have. Most all of them have it or they don't play that position.

Q: How much of their sack totals are based on just the quality of their defensive line and the fact that you have to take care of them besides taking care of those two? It's hard to focus in on one guy.

BB: No, you definitely can't do that. They're a very good front seven, and they bring them all, in different combinations. That creates a lot of one-on-one situations. It's a good pass rushing team. They have 60-something sacks, whatever it is. They're a good pass rushing team. Not only that, but they get you in a lot of passing situations. They lead the league in creating second-and-long and third-and-long for the offense. The more of those long yardage situations there are, the harder it is to protect and the easier it is for them to rush. They've had the offense in 75 third-and-10 pluses. That's a lot of long yardage situations. It's not like they just get one team in long yardage. That's the way they play defense. They create a lot of those situations. That helps the rush too.

Q: How has [Laurence] Maroney done in blitz pickup this year?

BB: Good. It could always be better, but it's been good. He did a good job of that in the preseason. I'm sure you remember some of those plays he had in preseason, the pickups he had in the early games. He's strong. He has good feet. He's quick. He's tough.

Q: Have teams tried to go one-on-one with Merriman at the start and it just doesn't work out? What have you seen?

BB: I think we've seen a lot of different things. You have 16 games there, so there's a lot of different offensive styles and matchups and so forth. Just like our outside linebackers. You see tight ends over there, you don't see them over there. You see backs chipping. You see the line slide. You see play action protections. I think you're going to see pretty much everything through the course of the year. As I said, one of the things that San Diego, Wade [Phillips], does a good job of is, they bring their linebackers in different combinations. It's not always the same guy or the same two guys. Sometimes it's the two outside guys. Sometimes it's the two inside guys. It could be two up the strong side. It could be two up the weak side. It could just be one guy. You don't really know for sure who's coming. Merriman and Phillips come a lot, I'm not saying that. But they don't come all the time, and if those are the only two guys you're trying to block, then you're going to have a lot of problems with [Randall] Godfrey and [Donnie] Edwards inside and some of the stunts that they run in there with them. You have to be able to pick up all seven players. You just don't know which ones they are, and that's part of the 3-4 defense. You can bring linebackers in different combinations and still play your six and seven man coverages and create different protection problems for the offense. That's what Wade does. They do a good job of it.

Q: [Tully] Banta-Cain's sacks have come in bunches. Is that by game plan? He said he's seeking consistency.

BB: Who isn't? We all are. No, I don't think it's a game plan thing. Sometimes it just works out that way. But he's done a good job of rushing the passer for us. He's done a good job playing the run. I think he's played solidly here for most of the second half of the season. He's played on a consistent basis out there. He's done a good job.

Q: Have you seen him take advantage of that more extended playing time and more opportunities and improve?

BB: I think he's definitely improved. He's definitely improved. He's seen a lot of different players out there like anybody would. He's seen some guys that are real athletic, like [D'Brickashaw] Ferguson last week, or guys that are real big like [Bryant] McKinney in Minnesota, and all the guys in between. He's seen different combinations of blockers and people out there and that experience has definitely helped him. He hasn't had a chance to have a lot of extended playing time at that position until this year, either at end or outside linebacker, however you want to look at it, and he has. He's played solidly throughout the course of the year and that certainly has improved.

Q: You used three first round picks on defensive linemen. When you look at the way these guys have played this year, is this kind of what you envisioned as a best case scenario?

BB: I think when you take a player, you want him to be productive in your system. It just kind of worked out that way with those three guys. We definitely thought they were good players, given where we took them. They were all a couple of pretty high first round picks really, even Vince [Wilfork]. We certainly thought a lot of them to take them where we did. The fact that they are playing together and complementing each other and work well in their different roles and combinations out there, that's certainly to our benefit. I can't sit here and tell you that's exactly the way we knew it was going to go, because I think there's always a degree of development with young players as to how they're going to work in your system. I think that they do, they

complement each other well and they work together well. They bring a lot of leadership as well as good play. They bring a lot of leadership to the football team and a lot of consistency too.

Q: Do you think that sometimes there's a disconnect between the fans and obviously people like yourself who are football experts...

BB: Between the fans and me?

Q: Yes.

BB: That's because it all goes through you, collectively.

Q: [Laughter] When it comes to picks like that, because defensive linemen, they're not attractive picks, but obviously they are very important in the grand scheme of things.

BB: They sure are. If you want to play good defense, as I've said a million times, it all starts up front. It's hard to be good on defense without good defensive players. I think if you look at any team that's a good defensive football team, they're going to have some good players in their front seven, probably their defensive line is a good place to start. It's not taking anything away from anybody else, because every position is important, every player is important. Again, I can't worry too much about what everybody else wants to do. I couldn't keep everybody happy even if I wanted to. I have to do what I think is best for the football team and that's what my opinion will always be. It doesn't mean it's right. It doesn't mean it's what everybody else thinks, but it's what I feel like is best for the football team.

Q: With the value that you guys put on game preparation, when you're looking at a free agent or a college kid coming out, are there certain things that you can look for and say, 'This kid is going to prepare for games the way we want him to?'

BB: Sure. Sometimes you think you can pick up indicators like that. Again, any time you look at a player you have to look at the entire player. Everything that comes with him. His vertical jump. His strength. His quickness. His intelligence. His work ethic. His experience. His versatility. However many things there are, they all have some value or maybe not. Maybe he doesn't have any value in a certain area, but maybe he has compensating value in other areas. You look at the whole everything that the player brings and then you try to, somehow or other, place a value on that. I'm not saying that there's any perfect scientific way to do it. You just look at the total picture and try to evaluate it. If you think that the player can help your team, then he has some value to you. If you think, 'Well because of whatever reasons, either we have better players, or he's just not going to be able to work well in this system,' for whatever those reasons are, any of the things that I just mentioned, then he has less value to you. I think you can have one thing, like all of us, there are things that we do well and there's other things that we don't do as well. It's the same thing with a player. He can have two or three weak points, and you know that they're weak points, but you see the strengths that the player has and you think that those are going to be able to override them, and he'll be productive for you, then you try to work on the things that he needs work on. You could say that about every player in the league.

Q: When a guy is preparing for a game, is that kind of equal parts -- intelligence and work ethic? Do both of those have to go into that for it to work?

BB: I think there are a lot of things involved. Certainly those are two important things. Instinctiveness and just being able to look at a situation and then apply it to what you're going to

do, that's important to. You can look at a play and that could be a great play, but based on what you're trying to do that play may not have a whole lot of relevance. You're just not going to be in that situation. There's other times where you can see plays and say, 'Well, this is exactly what we're going to be in on this call, on this play. This is what I'm looking for.' Again, I think that's a hard thing to quantify. I know players that can look at 10 times as much film as another guy, and the guy that looks at one tenth might get more out of it than somebody who looks at a lot more, if they're not really being able to absorb that information, even though it's there. Again, I can't quantify that, but I know what I'm talking about. I don't know if I'm explaining it to you or not.

Q: [Laughter] Is this team, this 2006 team in particular, good at preparing and getting themselves ready to play a football game?

BB: I think as a team there are a lot of strong points there. I think it could be better. I think overall the team does a pretty good job. Yes, I think they do a pretty good job. They try to focus on the areas that we try to identify for them. Sometimes, in all honesty, as coaches, starting with me, we miss the mark at times too. Trying to put the target over here and really that's really not where it should've been, in retrospect a lot of times you find that out. Sometimes you find that out later on in the week. I think generally speaking, they do a good job of trying to do what we want them to do and play the way we want them to play. There have been some weeks where I think it's been a lot better than others, and I've told them that. I think the more we can get on the same page, and again, we use a lot of feedback from them. They try to take the information that we give them and apply it the best they can, and just continue to work together on that and strengthen our preparations. That's part of the challenge. When you have a lot of coaches and a lot of players all trying to get on the same page in a short amount of time for a new opponent, a lot has come together. It doesn't always come together perfectly even though you want it to.

Q: Do you feel like you can lean on the leaders of this team quite a bit to set the level of expectation for that game preparation? Maybe some of your captains would obviously be the ones where they prepare a certain way, so everybody else feels like they have to as well?

BB: I think there's an element of that. Absolutely. I think we have a lot of players on our team that are exemplary in their work ethic, their preparation, their attention to detail and their determination to get it right, whatever that is, whether it's a play, a technique, a call, an adjustment or whatever it happens to be. I think that certainly has carryover value to other people who see that and also when you're in a team setting, when it's important to a lot of people for one thing to be right, then that other guy who maybe it could go either way with, then he ends up feeling that same way too, I'm going to join the party here and I'm going to make sure I'm not the one that makes a mistake on this. I think there's definitely an element of that and in place. The captains, I'd definitely put them in that category, but I think we have a lot of other players on our team that do a good job of that who aren't captains, but have the same type of preparation. I'm sure I know the guys who you're talking about, the captains and guys like that, I think there are other people on the team as well.

Q: [LaDainian Tomlinson] has an uncanny knack of hitting that halfback pass. It always seems like the receivers is 20 yards wide open. Is that like a run/pass option?

BB: I guess every pass could be a run option. If you're going to run a halfback pass, you can put a run option in there, where if the guy is covered, you don't want to just throw it down there and tuck it away and go. But I agree. It does look like most of the time when they call those, the

guy is standing there fair catching the ball. There's nobody near him. I was looking at that today, and even going back to previous years, from plays that we had from the '05 season, and the '04 season, because we opened with them early in '05. It was the third game of the year. We had a lot of stuff from '04 in preparation for that game. I'm with you. You look out there and you see the guy standing 20 yards behind the defense just waving for the ball waiting for it to come down. Again, I'm not taking anything away from Tomlinson as a thrower, but some of those plays have been extremely well executed, or designed, or run at the exact right time. If the guy is covered back there, Tomlinson can certainly pull the ball down and gain two or three yards, not throw it away, or not throw it into a situation where it might be a turnover.

Q: In terms of a team that relies on one player so much for touches, for different aspects of their game, is it at all similar to the Rams when Marshall Faulk was there in terms of so many touches, so many different ways?

BB: They're both great players. I wouldn't get away from that. I think the offenses are quite a bit different, in all honesty. They're both great players. They've both had a significant impact on their team. I understand all of that, but I think the offenses, there's a huge difference between Mike Martz's offense and Cam Cameron's offense. They've both been productive. They both have scored a lot of points. They both utilize the backs. I'm not saying that. A lot of San Diego's offense is centered around their tight end, in [Antonio] Gates. I would say if you look back at that St. Louis offense in particular, probably the tight end had the least amount of production of any of the skill players on the field, just as an example.

Q: Does that make this a harder game plan to draw up than Super Bowl XXXVI?

BB: Every game plan is hard. I think it's hard every week. I think every team has good players, especially at this point. Everybody has good players. They have good coaches. They have a good scheme. They're playing with a lot of confidence. They're 14-2. I'm sure they think they're going to be 15-2. I would too. They've won a lot of games. I'm sure they're confident. It's hard to prepare for this one. It was hard to prepare for the Jets last week. It was hard to prepare for the Rams. It's hard to prepare for everybody. All of those teams are good.

Q: You've said before that you've never gone on the field not thinking that your team was going to win.

BB: Right, that's a bad feeling, if you go out there like that. I couldn't say that in the strike years, with the Giants, in '87. I think I knew how that one was going to come out.

Q: [Laughter] So, you're going to go out there feeling confident. Your team has won a lot of games, there's no reason to feel that your team can't win. But when you look at the things that your team has to do right to win this game, does it seem like maybe a little bit of a longer laundry list than usual?

BB: It's a longer list, it's harder because they're better. They're good. Who has stopped San Diego offensively? They're averaging 31 points a game. They've been over 40, I don't know how many times, four times. I don't know. They've been in the high 30s probably half of their games. They're hard to stop. And they don't turn the ball over. Defensively, they've sacked the quarterback against everybody. They knock every quarterback down. I don't think we're going to go out there and complete every single pass, hold them to three yards rushing. It'd be great if it happens, but I think that's totally unrealistic. They have a good football team. They do a lot of things well. We'll have to play our best game. That's what it's going to take. I could say that about a lot of games that we've played and prepared for. You always feel like that.

Q: When you talk about mental toughness, how much of that is playing through pain, playing through an injury and sort of knowing the difference between them?

BB: I would define mental toughness as eliminating all distractions and focusing on your job. That to me is what mental toughness is. Distractions can come from everywhere. Bumps and bruises are part of them. All the other things that happen are part of them too. Being behind. Being in a tough situation. Whatever. You could pull out a million of them. Eliminating all of those distractions, eliminating all of the things that could keep you from doing your job, that's what mental toughness is.

Q: Does that come in more to focus in playoff situations because the pressure is up and that mental toughness has to be even more so in the postseason?

BB: I think the level of competition is higher. Whether it's mental toughness, physical toughness execution, turnovers, penalties, field position. To me, everything is heightened just because you're playing against the best team in the league this week. How can you think anything else? How can you think that, 'Well if that happens, it's not that big of a deal. If this happens, it's not that big of a deal?' You're playing against the best team in the league, so you better do everything the best you can do it to even give yourselves a chance to be competitive, especially after what happened last year. We played this team. They outscored us 24-0 in the second half. I think we all know we're going to have to coach a lot better and play a lot better than we played against them last year just to even be competitive.

Q: You have a much better defense than you did last year when you played them. Your defense is vastly superior to what it was then.

BB: They're better. They're 14-2. Go back and read the articles that you wrote before that game when they were 1-2 and tell me about how great they were. You were the ones sitting here talking about, 'How can you say they're any good? They're 1-2.' I can tell you that right now. I remember that press conference. They come in here and light us up, take the ball up and down the field, run it, pass it, shut us out in the second half and all of that. You talk about how great we were or weren't then, they were 1-2. 1-2. It doesn't mean anything anyway.

Q: Is there much carryover from what you saw last week from Brian Schottenheimer and what Cam does for San Diego?

BB: I think there's some. I think there's some. I think it's still two totally different teams.

Q: Is there a lot of motioning the same way that the Jets do?

BB: They do some. They do some. They don't run the no huddle. They've run it, I'm not saying they can't run it. They've run it, but they certainly don't run it the way the Jets do, which is pretty much every play. The motioning and shifting, there's a degree of that. I think the Jets do a lot more of it than San Diego does, and they do it with the no huddle. There are some similarities, but I think there are a lot of differences too. There's certainly a lot of differences in personnel and a lot of differences in the type of game that I think San Diego wants to play. That's not taking anything away from anybody. They might both come from the same tree, so to speak, but I think that the specifics are significantly different. We definitely aren't sitting in here saying, 'Okay, let's just Xerox off last week's defensive game plan. We can do the same thing against San Diego that we did against the Jets.' We're talking about a lot of different dynamics.

Q: But there are basic similarities?

BB: Look, there are some similarities, but there are a lot of differences. A lot of differences.

Q: With Rodney out for this game, do you expect Artrell Hawkins' veteran leadership to be even more important this weekend?

BB: Artrell has done a great job us all year. He missed a couple of games earlier in the season, but he's done a great job for us all year. He's very professional. He works hard. He communicates well. There is no player that puts in any more time than he does in terms of preparation and studying film. He's here early in the morning. He sometimes stays later than the coaches do. He puts in a lot of time and he's on top of it and I think that he and James Sanders have worked well together. They played together a lot this year, probably more than any other two safeties, just because of all of the circumstances that we've had back there. Both of them are very diligent in, not only their personal preparation, but also in coordinating and communicating through the secondary and making sure that everybody is on the same page and we have the calls and the adjustments right and that will be important in a game like this, just because San Diego gives a lot of formation variations and change their personnel groups around and they have some very unique and special players that are hard to match up against that you have to kind of know where they are, because even if it's the same call, when they start moving around, that kind of changes how you want to play it. He's done a really good job for us. I'm glad we have him.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS QUARTERBACK TOM BRADY
PRESS CONFERENCE
January 10, 2007**

Q: Talk about this matchup and how well you've played on the road.

TB: We've done some good things on the road... we've played well at times on the road. [San Diego is] a tough team, good in all three phases. It's a big challenge. What they do offensively is they keep the ball away from you with the great running back, very good receivers, Pro Bowl quarterback, very good offensive line, one of the best tight ends in the league. I guess they have nine Pro Bowlers or something like that, nine All-Pros; Like half their team is All-Pros. The defense, they rush the quarterback, they cover, they play smart, they're aggressive, they stop the run. They do everything. They're 14-2 for a reason. It's a big task. Hopefully we'll be ready.

Q: What stands out to you about what your receivers have accomplished from where they started?

TB: It's a hard-working group. I think the guys have taken a lot of pride in what they do and they continue to get better each week. A lot of it is just learning the system, trying to figure out a role. Obviously Jabar [Gaffney] and Reche [Caldwell] have really stepped up, Troy [Brown] has been really dependable, Chad [Jackson] is finding a role. We're very comfortable with what we're doing in the passing game.

Q: Shawne Merriman, how do you stay away from him?

TB: Do your best. You're not going to outrun him. He's 270 pounds. He runs like a deer. He's powerful. He's quick. He plays with a high motor. If it's not Merriman, it's [Shaun] Phillips or [Donnie] Edwards or [Randall] Godfrey or [Luis] Castillo or [Igor] Olshansky or [Jamal] Williams. The front seven is just... they're dominant. It's probably the best defense we've faced. They present a lot of problems for you in pass protection. They're so big. They cause a lot of problems for you running the ball. [They're] one of the best teams on first down. They create more second and third and long opportunities than any team in the NFL. They're good on third down. It's exactly what you want from a defense.

Q: Rivers is going into his first playoff game. Do you remember how you felt going into yours?

TB: Cold.

Q: Were there similarities? Trepidations because you hadn't experienced that?

TB: It's a bunch of hits ago. I hardly remember what I had for lunch. It's his third year. It's not like he's a rookie or anything. He's been playing on the team for three years. He's 14-2. He's done a lot of great things for them. I'm sure this situation isn't too big for him. He seems like he's a very competitive guy. He's very good at what he's been doing this year. I don't think the situation is too big. Obviously, the pressure is elevated, but he's obviously handled it very well.

Q: Did you feel elevated pressure?

TB: Like I said the other day, it's probably more over the course of the week, what you're doing with your time and making sure you're just taking care of what you normally take care of... not letting anything else get to you. Because, ultimately, once the ball is kicked off, you're playing

football and that's what you've been doing all year. [There's] no reason for him to get away from what he's been doing. He's been doing a great job.

Q: (On the Patriots not having any All-Pros in the locker room when the Chargers have five)

TB: I think they're that way for a reason. They're 14-2. They deserve it. They have great players, guys who are dominant players in the league—LaDainian [Tomlinson], [Antonio] Gates, [Shawne] Merriman, their kicker (Nate Kaeding), [Jamal] Williams, [Lorenzo] Neal. They've got [Terrence] Kiel. He's a [darn] good player. Everybody is playing well for them, so you try to find matchups that work in your favor, but there's an awful lot that, when you have All-Pros on the other side of the ball, you just have to try to do your best to hang in there.

Q: Do you like when teams blitz?

TB: I don't care what [teams] do. Blitz, cover, I don't care... Sometimes it clears up reads a little bit just because you realize you're not going to have as much time. Initially you just probably get to the guys who you think are your best one-on-one matchups out there, whereas [with] zone coverage you have to read it out little bit more.

Q: Do you feel the team is better equipped now to handle that kind of pressure?

TB: We've handled it better at times than others. Like the second time we played the Jets, we didn't handle it very well. [On Sunday] we handled it much better. It's just all about preparation. [The Chargers are] another big blitz team. They're about a 50 percent blitz team. They bring it. They get to the quarterback. It's going to be a challenge for the guys up front to handle the blitz pickup, it's going to be difficult... for all the communication stuff that normally happens on the road, and for the receivers to get open against one-on-one coverage, it will be challenging.

Q: People have said this has been your best year, because you have done more with less. Would you say that is a fair characterization?

TB: We're 12-4, 13-4 now. We've had a pretty good year. The passing game, we've been very efficient at times. Some days it hasn't looked so good. I think early... we started the year and just getting familiar with a new group of players is challenging for everybody, but our second half of the year has been pretty good. We've done a much better job all the way around—protection, routes, throwing the ball, catching the ball. It's been very productive and efficient the last, whatever, seven or eight weeks. I'm glad it's worked out that way, but there are always learning curves from my standpoint [and] from the standpoint of the receivers. We're in a much better place than we were earlier in the year.

Q: What did you do to take this group and mold it into a unit? Did you take more of a leadership role than you have in the past?

TB: We get great coaching, and the new guys who have been here have realized that —like Jabar [Gaffney] and Reche [Caldwell] and Chad [Jackson]—and they've taken to the coaching and they've come in and worked hard every day. This is a very hard-working group of players. It's not like we ever take days off and we practice extremely hard. And this is the first time we have been very healthy at the receiver position. Reche has missed like one day of practice all year. There were days last year where David [Givens] wouldn't practice all week and he would play or Deion [Branch] wouldn't practice, and so we have been very healthy and that has really accelerated the learning process because we have been able to go out there and practice every day and that's where the improvements really come.

Q: Did you take any added responsibility to try and get this group up to speed, more than you might have done in the past?

TB: I try to spend as much time as I can each year trying to do whatever I think we need; probably no different than previous years. It's 100 percent of my time, so it's hard to give much more than that.

Q: With their defense, do you feel like you have to play a perfect game?

TB: Oh yeah. It has to be as perfect as you can make it. They don't give you many second chances. They go after the football. They turn it over quite a bit. They intercept passes. They are so aggressive. [They have forced] a bunch of three-and-outs this year. They do everything well, so we just have to figure out a way to try to move the ball; when we get into the red zone, try to be productive in the red zone. But you're not going to get a whole lot of second chances versus these guys.

Q: They have all these records and guys going to the Pro Bowl, but you are the three-time Super Bowl champions...

TB: That's in the past. That's in the past. Those three Super Bowls, that was a long time ago. This year they're the top dog. 14-2. They have it all. They have it all. We're just going to go out there and try to compete as best we can.

Q: Is it okay with you guys to be the underdogs?

TB: Either way, favorite or underdog, none of that matters. I don't care what people say, point spreads or anything like that. They're 14-2 and 8-0 at home, so we have to travel out there and see if we can put together our best football, because that is what it is going to take.

Q: The offensive line, since the Miami game, have played at a better level each and every week. Can you talk about that?

TB: ...Maybe. Maybe. They've certainly had a great year. Once again, I think a big part of that has been [that] there's continuity there. For the second half of the year, most of the guys have been in there each week. Nick [Kaczur] and Steve [Neal] and Dan [Koppen] and Logan [Mankins] and Matt [Light], they have been solid. You can just see, when these o-lines are together over the course of the season [they] can just be very productive, because [they] learn to play together, there is a chemistry that develops. They are very good players and they are very smart and they are very well-coached. That leads to success.

Q: It almost seems like that Miami game was a turning point for them, a gut check.

TB: There are days... that Miami game was tough for everybody. I don't think anybody played that well. That was a gut check day for all of us, the last time we played really poorly. Miami did that to a bunch of teams this year... you know, Jason Taylor, those days, I'm trying to forget those days. But they had a bunch of days like that, and you just chalk it up to, hey, we have to go out and learn from it and try to make improvements. And I think we've really done that and since that game it's been much better.

Q: What type of game is this going to be, physical or fast paced?

TB: It's probably all of that. They're very physical. They're very tough. The front seven they have is a lot like Pittsburgh's a few years ago, where they just stuff the run, they rush the passer, [they have] athletic guys at every position, they run the quarterback down, you don't have time to throw, those guys cover well. Like I said, it is going to be challenging. They've had it going at home. We just have to put a good day [of practice] in today, tomorrow and Friday and head out there and see how it goes over the course of 60 minutes.

Q: One of the first games you played was an overtime win over San Diego in 2001. How much of a confidence boost was it for you? It was your third start.

TB: That was a great game for us. We came back. We were down 11 with just a few minutes left and we forced it into overtime. We got a long pass interference call to [David] Patten on an audible. That was pretty cool to do. Yeah I have some good memories of that day, and that was kind of when our season really started to improve. Our defense was playing well and we were playing at home and that was kind of the start of a really magical year for all of us.

Q: Your thought on what [Miami defensive end] Jason Taylor said about how Shawne Merriman should not be eligible for the Pro Bowl?

TB: I'm not going to comment on that. I'll leave that to Jason and Shawne. They'll talk about that over Mai Tais in Hawaii in a few weeks.

Q: Are you still mad at Marty [Schottenheimer] for the comments that he made last year?

TB: No. That's water under the bridge. Our season worked out fine, we had opportunities, and their season is obviously going very well now. He is a great coach. 15 winning seasons. He's got those guys playing great. Reche [Caldwell] thinks highly of him. All the guys from San Diego really liked him.

Q: How much are you picking Reche [Caldwell's] brain?

TB: On the defensive backs and stuff, Reche has a bunch of familiarity with those guys. I know he's friends with a bunch of those guys. They don't think too highly of us from what Reche says.

Q: For a team that has won 10 straight games, can the bye week disrupt momentum for them? Has that been an issue for you guys in the past?

TB: I'd much rather have the bye week. I'd win 10 and take the bye any day of the week. It depends what you do on the bye week. Hopefully, you try to improve and work on some stuff. I'm sure that's what they did. That's what we've done in the past.

PATRIOTS LOCKER ROOM QUOTES

JANUARY 10, 2007

LB Rosevelt Colvin, CB Ray Mickens, LB Tully Banta-Cain,
TE Daniel Graham, CB Asante Samuel, DB Artrell Hawkins

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS LINEBACKER ROSEVELT COLVIN LOCKER ROOM QUOTES

January 10, 2007

Q: When you see the letters MVP, what do you think about when you see Tomlinson there?

RC: I think he does a great job of running the ball, not just him but the offensive line, the tight ends, the fullbacks, they do a good job blocking for him. Obviously everything he's done this year has been tremendous. It's going to be up to us to limit that come Sunday.

Q: Is part of the reason he is so dangerous is because he knows how to use his ability?

RC: I don't know. You have to go ask him. What he shows on film is just that, he's a running back who has good vision, good feet, and is using the scheme, the opportunity, the timing of the game, the positions that they put him in and he takes advantage of it. I think that's what you would want from anybody that has an opportunity to make a play when their number is called, and this year he's done a lot of that. He's been successful at making the plays for his team.

Q: What do you see from the rookie left tackle on film?

RC: I think he does a great job. I think their whole offensive line does a great job. Obviously, them being the number two rushing team in the NFL. They are doing what they need to do to open up the holes for him, for LaDainian [Tomlinson] and [Michael] Turner, they are protecting [Philip] Rivers when they need to.

Q: Is he the best pass-catching back that you have faced this year?

RC: We have faced a lot of backs. I don't necessarily know. I know it's going to be a challenge just because they have a lot of guys with the ball in their hands that possess the skill to take it the distance. Not just him, but Antonio Gates, their wide receivers. Everybody has a skill set and it's the reason why they are in the NFL. He does a lot of things tremendously well. To say he is the greatest pass-catcher, he's the greatest rusher, he's a beast so, I think it's going to take 11 guys that are focused on doing their job and after they get their job done, their second effort can also help everybody else who has the opportunity to make the play.

Q: They don't make mistakes, not many turnovers, but you guys have had a lot of takeaways. You've had forced turnovers. It's almost like a force against force thing?

RC: Well you know they do a good of protecting the ball. Their team is built real well. They've got a great defense, great special teams. Their offense can move the ball, especially in the running game, if they get up and they can run the ball and keep the clock running, possession of the football is definitely going to be a must in this game, in any game it is, but definitely when you come down to crunch time in a Playoff game, you definitely want to have possession of the ball. Like you said, they haven't had very, many turnovers but it's up to us to go out, regardless if we

have a turnover or not to slow the offense down, to try to get Tom [Brady] and then the ball back as quick as possible so they can get out on the field.

Q: Is part of being part of this team and the experiences, knowing that in every level of the playoffs you know as good as you played at the last level of the playoffs you've got to step up even further for every advance.

RC: Well I think the important thing is just to get out and be consistent. If you're consistently going out, preparing well, consistently going out and trying to execute what the game plan is and doing what the coaches ask you to do, it gives you a better shot at winning. I think if you get caught up in, 'Now I got to play harder and faster or why didn't you play harder and faster the week before', I think everybody's going to go out and try to execute, everybody's going to go out and do their job. We all know what's at stake. It's our qualification to the next round. We are just going to try to work as hard as we can this week to get the game plan down and come Sunday it's going to all boil down to execution.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS CORNERBACK RAY MICKENS
LOCKER ROOM QUOTES
January 10, 2007**

Q: How tough is it to come in this time of year, late season, during the playoffs, to step right in and play?

RM: If you are not familiar with the system, it would be pretty tough, but I was kind of familiar with the system here. I am familiar with all the coaches. It's been a fairly easy transition. The hardest thing about this is getting together with your teammates – creating friends, chemistry – but that comes with time.

Q: You are here now and you obviously know what you are facing on the other side of the football on Sunday. Can you talk about those weapons they have. Is there one way to attack them?

RM: No, they're a really explosive team. They've got weapons everywhere. They won 14 games because they are that good. They are a 14-2 team. You can't just shut one person down. They've got multiple guys you got to look at and have to respect, so we have our work cut out for us this week and we're just ready to get to practice.

Q: Philip Rivers is a young quarterback in his first playoff game. You have probably played young quarterbacks in big games in the past. Do you recall any cases and whether you attacked them differently than you would a veteran?

RM: No, I wouldn't say that. Looking at him on film and what he's done this year. He has accomplished a lot this year. He certainly isn't playing like a rookie quarterback and he's not a rookie quarterback. A lot of people want to say that he's not a rookie quarterback. He has been in the league for a while. He's had good quarterbacks he's mentored from, I mean Drew Brees, a Pro Bowl quarterback also. So he is no rookie quarterback, he's shown that this year.

Q: How important is it for a group effort to try to slow down LaDainian Tomlinson?

RM: Yeah, you definitely need one person at the point of attack with him. If he gets singled up on somebody, it's going to be a long day for us. We have to have a lot of people swarming the ball. It's very important that we get him cornered with at least three or four guys because like

he's shown in the past, he can make some people miss, make you look dumb in the open field. You've just definitely got to be a swarming defense to stop him.

Q: It's amazing because you know he is getting the ball, you know he is going to run it, and he still does. As a defense, do you take a step back and say 'not too many people have had success, just how are we going to do this?'

RM: Well, LaDainian is a special player. A lot of people have already said that he is going to be one of the best in the game when it's all said and done, and rightfully so. The credit is due to him because of the fact of what he's already done. This is going to be a challenge getting ready for him. We know what to expect. He can beat you passing, he can beat you running, he is second on the team in receiving. You know obviously he is the leading rusher on the team, so you have to respect that guy in what he can do and how he can change a game.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS LINEBACKER TULLY BANTA-CAIN
LOCKER ROOM QUOTES
January 10, 2007**

Q: What kind of game are you expecting? Is it going to be a physical game more so than others?

TBC: I would hope so. I think that's what it's going to need to be in order for us to have a chance. This team pretty much has every challenge that we can possibly think of, and being physical is going to be a key.

Q: What are you going to do to try and rattle Philip Rivers?

TBC: Put pressure on him. It's as simple as that. That's just the one thing we have to do. Shutting down the run is going to be definitely a factor and then when they get in the passing situations, putting pressure on them is going to be a must.

Q: What kind of quarterback is Philip Rivers? How different is Philip Rivers from Chad Pennington, who you saw last week?

TBC: Well, I think he is an up-and-coming quarterback. This has been pretty much his biggest year to shine. I know that he feels like he has a lot to prove. People doubt him in certain aspects. I think that he is a quarterback who has a lot of talent and he is just waiting to prove himself.

Q: How much of your success rests here on just the front seven being able to defend the line, just on you guys without having to bring any extra help?

TBC: I mean that's going to be a big factor because those guys have to stay back in coverage for the times that they do throw up a shot or something. We're going to have to take pride in knowing that, if we're going to stop the run, it's going to be because of the front seven.

Q: How much does experience matter in a game like this? Does experience really make a difference in a game like this?

TBC: I would think so. Anytime you have a guy who can play in the post-season and play well, you know, like Tom [Brady], you pretty much have a little chip on your shoulder, you have a little confidence going into it, but I think at the same time when you have a guy who hasn't had any

experience, he has a chip on his shoulder to prove something, especially against a team like us whose been in this situation before.

Q: What impresses you the most about [LaDainian] Tomlinson?

TBC: I would just say his explosiveness; his ability to make cuts at full speed. He is not a guy who you really see chattering down. He's always going forward. He's always getting the extra yards. Once he gets into the secondary, it's pretty much over. He is a home run hitter. The guy is amazing.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS TIGHT END DANIEL GRAHAM
LOCKER ROOM QUOTES
January 10, 2007**

Q: Some people might look at tight ends and look at catches, but a tight end could be just as effective negating a player like Shawne Merriman or Shaun Phillips. How much pride do you take in that aspect of the game?

DG: I take a lot of pride in it. I like the challenge of the good players that I go against every week. It's going to be a lot of fun for me this week.

Q: When you end up going against their offense and Philip Rivers, it's his first playoff game. It makes a difference doesn't it?

DG: It's a big difference – a total playoff atmosphere. The speed is different. It is a whole different atmosphere.

Q: Is the chemistry between you and a tackle that you're lined up next to when you're helping in pass protection similar to the chemistry between you and Tom in the passing game?

DG: I think we do have to know each other. We have to work together. If we make a mistake it can cost our offense. We have to work together and be on the same page.

Q: What are your impressions of Antonio Gates? I know you're probably watching defenses but I'm sure you also watch tight ends from time to time.

DG: You know, first thing I'm impressed with how he switched his game from the hardwood to the field and adjusted so well. It's exciting to watch him play.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS CORNERBACK ASANTE SAMUEL
LOCKER ROOM QUOTES
January 10, 2007**

Q: What do you see when you see Philip Rivers?

AS: The guy that's running the offense. He knows exactly how it needs to be run. Making plays for his team and stepping up. He got them this far and he holds a great record. He is just doing a great job for them.

Q: The fact that it's the first playoff game for him [Rivers], that has to factor in doesn't it?

AS: Just because it is his first playoff game that doesn't mean anything. He can go out there and throw for 500 yards and what are you going to say then, 'It's his first playoff game.' Experience has nothing to do with it.

Q: Experience is a difference in a playoff game isn't it? Was it for you?

AS: You go out and do your job. Experience doesn't matter.

Q: Is it something that you guys relish going on the road during playoffs?

AS: It's a tough place to play up there. When you go out on the road, it's a different type of game than it is being at home. You got to try to keep the crowd out of you and you've got to start fast and try to make the plays, keep them silent.

Q: How important is it for offense and defense to make plays early in the game?

AS: It's important. We like to start fast. We got to go out there and try to set the tone. Starting from kickoff, when offense gets it and when defense gets it. If we want to win, we know we have to do that.

Q: As cornerback can you talk about the added complexity that [LaDainian] Tomlinson's ability to throw the ball brings to your game plan?

AS: You just got to be ready. It's playoffs. You never know what could happen. Coach might get out there and throw the ball. So you just have to prepare for everything. You've just got to be prepared.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS DEFENSIVE BACK ARTRELL HAWKINS
LOCKER ROOM QUOTES
January 10, 2007**

Q: Part of what you guys know how to do is lift up your level of play. You played well last week but you know going forward your level of play has to come up even more in the next round.

AH: Yeah that pretty much goes without saying. They're the best team. They've been the best team. Pretty much from the start of the season until the present day, so I'm sure they're going to play the type of game that they've played all year, which is pretty good. They've played well from ahead they've played well from behind. They have a bunch of guys who play good on an individual level, which makes them good collectively while executing.

Q: What makes Philip Rivers? Why has he had such a good year?

AH: He is a good quarterback he has good arm. He has a good understanding of the offense that they run. I think that he has good weapons around him. All of those things combined make him pretty good.

Q: Would it matter to you that it's his first playoff game?

AH: He has been in the league three years, he is far from being green. He is 14-2. He is a starter. So I don't think that plays into it very much at all.

Q: One of his weapons is Antonio Gates, who may be the best tight end in all of football. Can you talk about him a little bit?

AH: I think he is the best tight end. Especially in pass receiving. He can get down the field and make the other team pay. He is good at running routes.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS HEAD COACH BILL BELICHICK
PRESS CONFERENCE
January 10, 2007

BB: I think, in just speaking for our football team and coaching staff, I think we all know what kind of challenge we have in front of us with the Chargers. There's no question that they're the best team in the league. They've had an outstanding year, 14-2, their only two losses were right at the end of the game, very close games. Just about everything you want to say about that football team complimentary is well deserved. They do everything very well. I think it starts right at the top with A.J. [Smith] and Marty [Schottenheimer]. They've put together an outstanding team. It's a very young team. I know they have a couple of experienced players on either side of the ball, [Randall] Godfrey and [Donnie] Edwards on defense and Keenan [McCardell] and Lorenzo [Neal] there on offense. It's a very young, talented group. They've drafted extremely well. They have great players at every position. Their team really is the All-Pro team. They have a ton of players. I have a lot of respect for Marty and what he's done. He's had a tremendous career. His two hundredth win, 15 winning seasons. He's pretty much there every single year. His teams always play well. I think the biggest thing about San Diego that impresses me is just how few mistakes they make. They don't turn the ball over. They don't have many bad plays against them. They're consistent. They're tough. They make you earn everything you get. It's hard to get anything on them. It's hard to stop them. It's hard to move the ball on them. Their front seven is outstanding. They're very good on special teams. Scoring -- we always talk every week about playing four quarters of football, but you look at the 176 points that they've scored in the fourth quarter, that's so far off the charts, it's hard to even relate it to anything else. Think about it, they've won 14 games, so it's not like they're coming from behind every week. They put up points from the beginning of the game to the end of the game and they do it in a lot of different ways. They have a lot of great weapons. An outstanding football team, and it's a huge challenge for us going out there, where they're undefeated at home. We're going to have to play our best football game. That's what we're going to prepare to do this week. It's a big challenge ahead of us. It's going to be a tough fight out there.

Q: How do [Shaun] Phillips and [Shawne] Merriman affect how quarterbacks play? And how does a quarterback have to be aware of what they do?

BB: I think it's more of a problem for the guys who are blocking them. The quarterback can't block them. Those are guys that most of the time you would have picked up, just like a defensive lineman, somebody is assigned to him. Having somebody assigned to him and getting him blocked is two different things. They have a good defensive system. Wade [Phillips] has been at it a long time. His teams have always played well defensively we ever he's been. Their linebackers are an outstanding group. They have a great front seven. Those two guys off the edge are tough, but they bring the inside people as well, Godfrey and Edwards, in different combinations. They bring sometimes one, sometimes the outside two, the inside two, two up one side, two up the other side. So they keep you off balance. You have to block all seven of them. They're hard to get blocked.

Q: Do they play Phillips and Merriman down much?

BB: In sub. Not in regular. They play a 3-4, so they're outside linebackers.

Q: Kind of like you guys do?

BB: Yes, that's the way it is for most 3-4 teams. I'd say the majority of them, anytime they go to a 4-3, or a four-man line sub defense, that their outside linebackers are really their defensive ends in pass rush. Pittsburgh. Dallas. Just about everybody does that. Cleveland.

Q: Do they mix it up much? Will they take Phillips and drop him? Will they take Merriman and rush him?

BB: Yes.

Q: So it's hard to get a read on them is what you're saying, right?

BB: Right. They bring them all. They bring the two outside guys, the two inside guys, two to the left, two to the right, two strong, two weak, bring one. They give you a lot of different combinations, and you have to be ready to block all seven of them really. because you don't know which five it's going to be, or which four it's going to be.

Q: Obviously, [LaDainian] Tomlinson has a lot of speed and a lot of athletic ability. Is part of what makes him so dangerous is his knowledge of how to use that speed and athletic ability?

BB: Yeah, well he definitely knows how to use it and they get him the ball in a lot a different ways. He's their second leading receiver. He gets the ball out of the backfield. He gets it on a variety of running plays. They run him on sweeps, off tackle plays, inside plays, misdirection plays, draws and use him in the passing game on some routes and check down screens. He's a guy that they get the ball to in a lot of different ways and he's outstanding. He can do it all. He can run inside, run outside. Obviously he's tremendously talented in the open field and has a great nose for the goal line. Nobody finds the end zone better than he does. He's outstanding with the ball in his hands. When they hand it to him, there's no way to keep him from getting it. In the passing game, maybe you could do something and try to take him away as a pass receiver, but when they hand him the ball in the running game, you have to tackle him.

Q: What did you see in [Reche] Caldwell that made him appealing as a free agent?

BB: Well, we knew Reche coming out, and of course he had a good game against us last year. I think he's a talented receiver when he had an opportunity to play. He had some injury history out there where he wasn't able to perform all the time, but when he was able to play, he was a player that could get open and had good hands, could catch the ball and create some separation.

Q: When you look at that receiver group as a whole from where it started at the beginning of the season to where it is now, what stands out to you?

BB: They work hard. They're well prepared. And they really try to do all the little things to get it right. I have a lot of respect for them.

Q: Have you seen steady improvement or did you notice a point where...

BB: No, I think it's been steady. They come in, and I get film, and start looking at the team Monday, the game that we just played, and correct those mistakes and then Tuesday start looking at the next opponent. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, red area, third down, two minute, all those situational things, they work hard. They study a lot of film. They go over their assignments. They help each other out. They watch film together as a group and try to watch it with the quarterbacks. I'm impressed with the way they work. I think it's been consistent and it continues to get better.

Q: How much does Tom [Brady] help the receivers?

BB: Well, of course, he's the guy that's throwing the ball. I'll tell you what, they listen a lot more to what he says than what I say. If I tell them to run a route at 14, that's good. If he tells them to run it at 14, they're going to run it at 14 because he's the guy that's throwing them the ball. I don't throw them the ball. I think it's always good to have your quarterback and receivers working together. Tom is outstanding at working with all of his teammates, running backs, the tight ends, the receivers, all of them. It's critical that the receivers and the quarterback are on the same page in terms of the decision making and what each guy sees, so they all see the same thing, so they can execute the play. He's great at it.

Q: Has Brian Daboll done an exemplary job with them?

BB: Yeah, he sure has. Again, I talked about the receivers coming in here, but he's the guy that's meeting with them and working with them and showing them extra film and taking extra time with each guy. Like any position, each guy has his own strengths and weaknesses, things that he does well or has his own individual techniques, or maneuvers, or whatever and Brian has done a great job of incorporating those into the overall system and refining some things that need a little more work, including the running game. He's done a great job.

Q: How do you prepare a quarterback who is making his first career playoff start with [Philip] Rivers?

BB: I think that's a question that you need to ask Marty. He's 14-2, so I wouldn't worry too much about that. He's done pretty well.

Q: Can you relate with to Brady in '01?

BB: Not really, it was two different teams. I'm sure you do the same things that you do every week. Study the opponent. Go through the game plan. Make sure that your players are aware of what they need to do and how you want them to execute those plays.

Q: Your red zone defense obviously has done quite well. Can you talk about the emotional value of holding an opponent to a field goal or nothing at all?

BB: It depends on the situation. Any time the offense gets the ball down there, like what happened last week where they recovered a fumble down, well they're already in field goal range. So, defensively, to be able to hold them to a field goal there it's like a three and out. It's almost as good as you can do, other than turning the ball over. When they drive it the whole length of the field and you hold them to a field goal, that's better than letting them in the end zone. Sometimes it's hard to feel good about when they just take the ball 65 yards on you. It could go a little bit both ways. Certainly the defensive objective is to keep them out of the end zone. If you can limit the amount of points, then obviously that increases your chances of winning and that puts a lot less pressure on the offense and gives you confidence that you can stop them, sometimes, even though it's been after they've gained some yardage, at least when you walk back out there on the field next time, you do feel like, 'Well at least we did get them stopped. We just have to get it done earlier.'

Q: Given their ability to control the pace of the game with a back like Tomlinson late in the game...

BB: Not to cut you off here, but I wouldn't stop with Tomlinson now. They have several good backs. [Michael] Turner is averaging almost a yard a carry more than he is. Neal is a pain in the neck, and that's not taking anything away from Tomlinson, believe me, I'm not saying that. It's not like when he's not in there, 'Well they have no running game.' They have a real good one too.

Q: With that ground game then, how important is it for you guys to avoid digging yourselves a hole, and getting up on them, and avoiding a double-digit deficit?

BB: Believe it or not, that's what we usually try to do. I've never stood up in front of the team and said, 'You know fellas, if we're down by 14 don't worry about it, we still have a good game plan at that point,' and there's times when you have to play in that situation, but you always want to try to play from ahead. You always want to try to go out there and establish your game plan, your tempo at the beginning of the game and get the game under control and play from even or ahead. You always try to do that, but there's no question that San Diego is a great team. When they are ahead, they have an outstanding running game, play action passing game, they can rush the passer, 60-something sacks or whatever it is. When you're behind on them then, as we know from last year, it really just gets worse. They tee off on the quarterback. It's harder to throw. They can run the ball as well as any team in the league, so it's hard to get it away from them and they can chew up the clock and just play keep away. You don't want to be in that situation, there's no question. You don't want to be in that situation. But, we never want to be in that situation.

Q: Is it down and distance that determines how much you pay attention to Tomlinson versus [Antonio] Gates?

BB: There's a lot of things. Down and distance is a factor. I wouldn't say it's the only factor. Tomlinson gets the ball, and like I said, he's their second leading receiver. He gets the ball in other down and distance situations besides first down, as does Gates get it on a lot of other situations besides third down. I think you defend players based on, down and distance is a part of it, field position could be a part of it, and certainly formation. You need to know where they are and what they kind of do from those certain sets. A lot of times when you look at a formation, you can eliminate certain plays that they want to run, or certain routes that a receiver would run just by either by his location or where the other people are around him. So you try to eliminate some things, but again, they have a multiple offense. They shift and move people around a lot. They do a good job of game planning. It's hard to know exactly where they're going to be. Even Tomlinson, he's out of the backfield a decent amount in empty formations and stuff like that. That's a problem. They run him out of the backfield on pass routes. You can stack your defense in there for the running game, but sometimes you have to cover him on perimeter passing plays as well. I think it's a combination of things.

Q: Is there any chance that you would put [Asante] Samuel on Gates?

BB: There's a chance.

Q: [Laughter] Speaking of chances, what are the chances of Rodney Harrison playing this week?

BB: We'll have the injury report after practice. I know you'll be waiting anxiously for it.

Q: On Monday you said that you could get to a point where you just have too much film on an opponent. When you're looking at film of an opponent, what is more

important -- the games that they've lost or the games that they've played a defense similar to yours?

BB: Well, I think you can learn something from every game. I think that at this point, when you've watched San Diego play 1,000 plays on offense, 1,000 plays on defense, plus we played them last year and all of that. At some point, you just have to boil it down. It's just too much. They can't run all of that against us, or anybody for that matter. There's just not enough time, not enough plays. So you have to boil it down to where you're going to put your emphasis and go with that and then be aware of some other things maybe that they've done or could do. But I think there's a lot of things to take into consideration, the teams that have done well against them, teams that haven't done well, maybe that's how not to do it, sometimes that's as important as how to do it. Close games. Teams that play a similar defense, or a similar front, or similar coverages, I think that there can be some application there. In the end, I think it has to be a culmination of a lot of different informational points and then put it all together. I think it's just hard to say, 'Well, we're just going to look at this one game,' or, 'We're just going to look at this one thing that somebody or other did,' it's a little broader than that. I don't think you could boil it down quite that far.

Q: When you boil it all down, have you ever seen a team as well balanced on both sides of the ball as this year's San Diego Chargers team?

BB: I've seen some pretty good football teams now, but I would certainly put them up there. 14-2, and like I said just losing two real close games. They can run it. They can throw it. Play good defense. That's why they're 14-2. That's why they're the best team in the league. They do everything well. They're well coached. They're tough. Physical. They don't make a lot of mistakes. And they do a lot of things well. They have a lot of good players.

Q: What impresses you about Rivers?

BB: Number one -- his record, I think that's the bottom line. They don't have many turnovers. He doesn't give the ball away much. He makes good decisions. He has a good arm. He's athletic. He has some quickness in the pocket. He has a strong arm. He can throw off balance. He doesn't have any problem getting the ball there. It won't be a question of arm strength or accuracy. He's like a lot of their young players. San Diego has as many as anybody as I've seen in a long time. They have a lot of, not only young players, but a lot of quality, young players. A lot of good ones on both sides of the ball and in the kicking game. He's one of many that I would throw into that category.

Q: Does it appear to you that they've expanded his responsibilities in the passing game over the second half of the season?

BB: It looks like they pretty much run their passing game. I didn't think that they didn't have an extensive passing game earlier in the year. I don't know. I would say watching him play and watching them play offensively, I don't think there's a lot of things that they don't feel like he can do, or are a lot of difference from last year when Drew [Brees] ran it. It looks like they run the plays that are inherent to that offense and to complement the running game and to complement each other in the passing game, they run it. He executes them and they hit plenty of them.

Q: There's been a common theme with them from people who've been watching them all year saying that maybe Cam Cameron has had more of an influence on their offense and maybe Marty has loosened it up a little bit and has let Cam do a little bit more with that offense. Do you see that?

BB: I don't know. I don't know how they could do much more than what they did against us last year, whoever is doing it. They ran us off the field. They outscored us 24-0 in the second half. They scored 41 points. I don't know. It didn't look too bad to me last year. They're averaging 31 points a game this year. I don't know what more they have to do. I hope they don't do too much more than what they did. 41 points. I hope it's not too much more than that this time.

Q: What do you think are the better attributes of Matt Light and Nick [Kaczur] at tackle?

BB: I think there are a lot of things you have to have to play that position. Athletic ability. Size. Quickness is one of them. Mental toughness. Intelligence. Technique. I think all of those things are important. You could take a good athlete that doesn't play with good technique and you probably won't get very far. If you take a guy that has good technique and isn't a very good athlete, you probably won't get very far. Guys that make mistakes out there, there's not a lot of times you can get help. Centers and guards are tied up inside, so it's one-on-one. If you miss an assignment, or have a bad set, or make a mistake, there's not much of a second line of defense. Whereas a lot of the times, with the guard and center, there's kind of three-on-two in there, especially in the passing game, where you have the linebacker off the line of scrimmage. It doesn't happen quite as quick. It's usually not quite as big of a disaster if it happens inside compared to outside. But I think all of those things are important. Without any of them, the weaknesses could offset the strengths in a hurry.

Q: Are tackles like safeties in essence, given there is no safety net back there?

BB: Well, sure. On defense, the secondary is the last line of defense. So however the coverage and the play unfolds, usually when it gets to them, your defensive ends and nose tackles aren't going to run too many guys down. If they don't make the play, that's pretty much the last line of defense. In a lot of cases, that's true of the tackles too. Those linemen are all committed on somebody else. We talked about, 'Well you could keep somebody in,' a lot of times keeping somebody in just brings somebody else into the picture. That's not really the answer either. What you really need from your tackles is for them to be able to block the guys they have to block.

Q: Is there any common characteristic to a Wade Phillips-coached defense?

BB: Well, they're all pretty good. He's a 3-4 base guy. He's always had good linebackers. It always seems like he's always had a good nose tackle. I would certainly put [Jamal] Williams in that category. They're tough to run against. They're tough to throw against, just in terms of blocking the front. He's not a real exotic guy with 50 new defenses every week. That's not really his thing. They do what they do. They do it well. You have to block them. You have to block them and you have to get open on them. I don't think finding them is going to be a problem. Where's [Marlon] McCree going to line up? Where's Edwards going to line up? Where's Williams going to be? I don't think that will be a problem. I think blocking them is going to be a problem. I think getting open is going to be a problem. He's a very good fundamental coach. His teams always play with good technique. They're tough. They hustle to the ball and they don't give up a lot of big plays, because they're sound and they know what they're doing and they execute it well.

Q: Are they any different from Pittsburgh's 3-4?

BB: Yes. There's certainly some carryover, but I would say that there's a significant amount of differences to it. There's some elements of 3-4 linebackers pressuring, but I would say less zone blitzing, although San Diego, they certainly do their share of zone blitzing now.

Q: Rivers is still relatively inexperienced at this stage in his career. Does it give you an opportunity maybe to try get in his head a little bit and show him some things that maybe he hasn't quite seen?

BB: Look, all we're trying to do is stop their whole offense. You can't stop one guy. You just can't stop one guy. They have too many good guys players. They have a good offensive line. Good tight ends. Good backs. Good receivers. I think everybody has to do their job and you have to play good team defense. I don't think you can just gang up on one guy. They have too many of them.

Q: When you're scouting a guy who hasn't played college football, like [Stephen] Neal or Gates, what are some of the things that you're going to look for right away?

BB: Well, I think the number one thing that you have to see in that situation is athletic ability and a couple of characteristics, like a guy that will work hard and has some intelligence and has some toughness. You're obviously not going to see a refined player, so techniques and understanding and instincts and all that, you're probably starting from scratch at that point. You just have to hope that you'll be able to improve those things in time with reps and experience and understanding. So therefore, a player's chance to make up for it would be athletic ability, and some physical characteristics, but anybody that is that far behind would have to be pretty intelligent and pretty hard working in order to make up the amount of ground that they would have to make up with other players that have been playing the game a lot longer.

Q: Does it take a great deal of patience on the coach's part?

BB: It depends on fast the player comes along. If the player is coming along fast, I don't think it would take too much patience at all. If you feel like it's going to be a long process, then you just have to decide how long you're willing to wait and what kind of upside, what are you developing, I guess that's the question you have to ask yourself. Are you developing a guy who is going to maybe make your roster or maybe not? Probably never really have a chance to have a lot of playing time and be a legitimate player for you. Do you want to put three years into that project? You could probably find other guys that could come in and do that a lot quicker with out all of that work. Now, if you think that the guy has a lot more upside, and he could be kind of a full time player for you, or a real solid contributor, more than just a guy that might be able to hang on the roster for a year or two, then you're developing a different type of player. I think that's something that you have to take into consideration, what kind of upside you think the player has in your system.

Q: What did you see in Neal early on that made you think he'd be worth keeping around?

BB: Well, obviously not enough because we let him go, but then we brought him back. First we started him off on defense, which that was stupid. He can't play defense. But he can run and he's big and he's physical, but the game was just too fast for him on the defensive side of the ball. There was just too many things happening. He just couldn't play on the defensive side of the ball. So by the time we moved him over to offense that first year, he was so far behind in terms of terminology. He didn't know where to line up in the huddle. By the time the end of training camp came, we knew he couldn't play defense, and then he was so far behind offensively that there was a lot of ground to make up. By the end of the year, we had some injuries, some roster maneuverings took place. We were able to carry him as a roster player even though he never played. At the end of that season, because we did like his work ethic, we did like his toughness and his athletic ability and kind of wanted to put in another year with him

but starting from scratch on the offensive side of the ball, not juggling him around like we did. That actually worked out pretty well, and of course he got hurt in the '02 season. He had a little temporary setback there, but again, I think that's a real credit to him, even though he missed that time, most of the second half of the '02 season, the second two-thirds it, whatever it was, that he was able to come back and continue to develop as a player even though he was out.

Q: Can you talk about the threat that Vincent Jackson poses? Is he similar in any way to the big receivers you faced against Jacksonville?

BB: Yeah, sure is. I think he's maybe a little quicker than a couple of those guys. But, yeah, he's a big target. He's not quite a tight end, but he's somewhere in there between, he's a big receiver. He's a guy that's big. He's a great target. He's a tough guy to bring down after the catch. He's worked his way into the lineup and McCardell has really now become more of their third receiver. Jackson is an imposing guy out there. He's definitely a problem to tackle. He's a problem to cover. His size presents a problem down the field and he's also a good target on the shorter intermediate plays where you lay off of him and he catches it and then breaks a tackle and gains yards as a runner, run after the catch. It's definitely a problem. [Eric] Parker. McCardell. They have a good group of receivers to go with their tight ends and backs.

Q: Can you talk about your history with McCardell a little bit?

BB: Well Keenan was like an eighteenth round draft choice, or something like that, by the Redskins. I forget. There were more rounds than what we have now. So he was a plan B signing in Cleveland. Different, but similar to the Troy Brown scenario, on and off the roster, practice squad, didn't play, but in the opportunities that he did get to play, he played pretty well and by the end there, in '94, and in even '95, he worked and developed into one of our best receivers. Quick. Smart. Real good hands. Has a great sense of instinctiveness for the game. Getting open. Knowing how to set people up. He's not the fastest guy. He's not the strongest guy. But he's quick. He has great hands. He has great instincts and the quarterbacks have a lot of confidence in him, as they should. Then he went down to Jacksonville and he's had a tremendous career. That's the kind of guy I think you always hold up as a model for other young players, 'Here's a guy that was barely drafted out of UNLV, Troy Brown [out of] Marshall, late pick, anybody could've had him. Was with a couple of other teams. He would sit on the practice squad. Bounced around a little bit. But he just kept working and kept getting better and both of those guys have gone on to have great, great careers.

Q: It came out of San Diego this morning that the Chargers are blocking most of their tickets for the Charger fans. Do you have any comment on that?

BB: Are you serious? I'm just trying to coach the team. I don't really care about tickets. I think you need to talk to somebody else about the ticket situation. Do you have any football questions?

Q: Can you talk about Lorenzo Neal's contributions to their running game?

BB: Running game and kickoff return. They have one of the best kickoff return production teams in the league and he's kind of the lead blocker on that, just like he is in the running game. As a fullback he's kind of the eyes of the runner. He sees the hole and kind of gets through the hole before the runner does, which a good fullback does, and that helps LaDainian Tomlinson or [Michael] Turner, whoever is running the ball. He's a strong player. He has good balance. Tough. He can really hammer it in there and block defensive linemen and block linebackers. He's a tough kid. Good in blitz pickup. Handles the ball pretty well. Surprisingly, for a fullback, he has a high yards per carry average in the running game. Catches the ball well out of the

backfield. He's a tough, dependable player that adds a lot to their football team and he certainly brings a lot of toughness to the game.

Q: Is it fair to say that Caldwell has met or exceeded your expectations?

BB: We don't really put some big stamp of expectations on anybody. We sign players that we think can contribute to our team, or acquire them, however it is, whether you draft them or assign them or trade for them, or whatever you do. Then you get them here and you start coaching them. As long as they're improving and developing, then that's good. Reche has certainly come in here and worked as hard as anybody. He spends a lot of time around here doing extra things trying to get better and trying to understand how to improve a technique or a route or recognition or an adjustment or whatever it is. I have all the respect in the world for Reche and what he's done. He's exhibited a good level of toughness and competitiveness. He's made some big plays for us. I think he'll continue to get better, at least I hope so. If he continues to work hard, he'll improve in our system and improve as a player. He's still young. He's a hard-working kid.

Q: I know you don't like comparing them, but are there any similarities between Merriman and [Lawrence] Taylor?

BB: They wear the same number.

Q: Besides that.

BB: Certainly there's some comparison. They played a similar position. They're both good and they're both very productive, very productive players. I think they have a different style of play. I would say [they have] a different style of play. They've both been effective. I'm not taking anything away from anybody, but I couldn't sit here and say they really look kind of the same to me. I wouldn't say that. I would say that they're both productive. They're both good football players. They're both very strong, but I would say their overall skills, I see them a little bit differently.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS HEAD COACH BILL BELICHICK
PRESS CONFERENCE
January 8, 2007**

BB: We're a little early here today, but just trying to get past yesterday and get on to San Diego. Obviously we have a lot of work to do. We put all of our energy and time into the Jets. Now we are obviously behind on San Diego, so we'll try to put the full court press on them. They're a great football team. 10 in a row. Undefeated at home. They've outscored their opponents by 200 points. You can go right down the line. 60-something sacks, whatever it is. It looks like they can do it all. They can score a lot of points, run the ball, stop the run, rush the passer, return kickoffs. They don't look like they have a lot of weaknesses in their game, which you wouldn't expect them to have. They're 14-2, the top seed in the AFC. That's a big challenge for us. We've already started to try to get ready for this one.

Q: How did your advance scouts work on San Diego and Baltimore last week? Did you try to split them half-and-half?

BB: No, we had to do it after the Jacksonville game, when we knew we were in the playoffs, then we tried to split it up. There's a lot of different possibilities with Denver and the Jets and these two teams, Indy, not this week, but we could end up with them. There's a lot of different possibilities there. We were spread kind of thin, but we just tried to catch everybody.

Q: Last week, was there work done on both Baltimore and San Diego?

BB: Well, yeah, but we kind of prioritized San Diego just because of the seedings. If the game turned out differently on Saturday, if Indianapolis had lost on Saturday to Kansas City, then we couldn't have played San Diego and then we would've just had our scouts and some other people really go to work on...we would've flipped it around between Saturday night and this morning as much as we could have. We're behind no matter how you do it.

Q: How complete a back is [LaDainian] Tomlinson?

BB: He's pretty good. He's the MVP. I don't know how you could be any more complete than that. Run. Catch. Throw. Play blitz pickup. He can do it all. He does it well. Their backs are real good. It's not just him either. They have a good set of backs.

Q: What kind of growth have you seen from him since 2002 to last year and even now?

BB: I don't know. He killed us last year.

Q: He had 217 in 2002. I'm just wondering if you've seen a development.

BB: He's looked pretty good to me, unfortunately, every time we've seen him. We're usually looking at the back of his jersey. We haven't done very well against him. He's killed a lot of people besides us, and he's killed us. But like I said, I haven't seen all that many games on him this year, but the ones I've seen, a team might keep him down for a few carries, but it's just a matter of time before he breaks out, in one way or another, and gets in the end zone.

Q: In terms of the central role that he plays in their offense, is there any comparison at all between him, and say, Kevin Faulk of five years ago, in terms of how central he is?

BB: Again, up until a few hours ago, the only team, really, I've watched is the Jets. I've seen a couple of games on him. Starting to get into him. I think Wednesday I'd able to say a lot more about what they do. I don't want to just throw out a bunch of garbage here.

Q: Historically, what has been your experience, in terms of a young, inexperienced quarterback in the playoffs, making his first start? I know you went through it with Tom [Brady] and were successful.

BB: I think there's plenty of young quarterbacks that have done well. [Ben] Roethlisberger won a Super Bowl last year. Brady won a Super Bowl. [Philip] Rivers is a good quarterback. They have a good football team. It's no one-man band out there. They have a lot of players that are good players.

Q: As a coaching staff, when you go in with a young quarterback who has never started a playoff game though, do you discuss at all pulling back at all or do you just say, run what you run?

BB: I'm sure every situation is different. I don't know how Marty [Schottenheimer] is approaching it. He's a great coach. He's had a tremendous career. I'd like to have as many wins as he has, believe me. I'm sure he'll do a great job with all of the things that he has to work with out there.

Q: How did you approach that with Tom?

BB: We did what we thought was best for the football team each game. Each game was different. The Oakland game was different from the Pittsburgh game. The Pittsburgh game was different from the St. Louis game. It was a game plan for us. We did what we thought was best for the football team, for the entire team, not just the quarterback, but what we thought was best for the team. Look, whoever you put out there, they have to play. It doesn't make any difference what position they play, they have to play. And you have to coach. You do what you think is best and go out there and try to execute it.

Q: You said a few hours ago, what time were you here today?

BB: I've been here for a couple of hours.

Q: Does Rodney [Harrison] have a chance to play in this game?

BB: We'll see. We're just day-to-day. Get past the Jet game, and now we'll start working on next week. All I knew is what I told you last week, so we'll see where we are.

Q: You said you have very little on San Diego, so you are kind of in a cram session until Wednesday when the players come back?

BB: Yeah, we have two days as a staff to get things...it will go through the whole week, it's not like Wednesday is the end of the week. We'll do what we can do in the next couple of days to get the players ready to go. The players are looking at them too, to get familiar with the Chargers. We'll have something for them by Wednesday and we'll keep building that through the week.

Q: Is there any relevancy at all to the game you guys play last year?

BB: Sure. We have to take a look at that. Hopefully we can be a little more competitive than that. It was 24-0 in the second [half]. They were pretty much running out the clock the whole

second half. We don't want that to happen again, that's for sure. It wasn't even really a competitive game.

Q: With regards to your team at this stage, how do you feel about the level of play at this moment? Do you feel like you're playing your best?

BB: I think we're going to need to play our best against San Diego. I think, based on the body of work, over a 16 game regular season schedule, they're the best team in the AFC. We're going to have to play our best game of the year against them. It doesn't make any difference what happened last week or last month. The only thing that matters is what happens on Sunday. So that's where we have to focus all of our energy and preparation and try to put our best game out there on Sunday. That's what it's going to take and that's what we need to do.

Q: How difficult is it to face a defense like they have with [Shawne] Merriman, and their whole defense, without knowing, at this point, that much firsthand about them, other than last year?

BB: Well, we couldn't do much against them last year. They're a good defensive football team. They're a good football team period. We have a lot of work to do. I'm not minimizing that. So, to sit there and say that we have a lot to do, absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more.

Q: Does it help, in terms of your preparation, that Brian Schottenheimer was sort of raised professionally under Cam Cameron in San Diego and runs an offense somewhat similar to what Cam does? Does that help in the preparation in terms of any similarities?

BB: I wouldn't say a whole lot, no.

Q: In terms of how you will approach this week with the team, and traveling wise, will you alter anything just based on the distance?

BB: We'll make our decisions on that here...that's another thing we have to do and talk about today and try to get that settled.

Q: Is it a possible consideration to go out on Friday or maybe earlier on Saturday?

BB: Sure. We'll do whatever we think is best for the football team. We'll take into consideration everything. What arrangements are possible, I'm not even sure. There's some logistics involved, so we'll see what the options are and try to make the one that we feel is best for the situation and for our team. Right. That's on the agenda today too.

Q: The touchdown to Kevin Faulk yesterday, how critical was it at that stage to get a touchdown instead of a field goal, understanding that would've made it a two score game either way?

BB: That's what you always want to do. I guess there could be a situation where you would just hand the ball off and play for three to keep the clock running. Against a team like the Jets, that's doing a lot of blitzing in that situation, we ran the ball on them earlier in the game and some plays against their sub and they kind of tightened that up and started running some inside blitzes. I don't know. I guess you could run the ball and let 40 seconds run off the clock. If you pick it up, you pick it up. You kick the field goal and give them a little bit less time, but we felt like we could have a chance to execute our passing game down there, and obviously they missed an assignment on Faulk, Tom saw him and made a good play.

Q: Is that an easy read for a quarterback to make?

BB: It all depends on the play and the defense. You have a progression to take on the pattern. If they make a mistake where you're reading it, then it is fairly easy. Sometimes they miss coverages and, for whatever reason, you're not reading that particular part of the pattern and you don't see it. This was a case where Kevin was an outlet receiver on the blitz, and he didn't have pick up, so that was the guy that Tom was looking at and made a good throw. Kevin broke it off. It's what you want to happen. I'm sure that there should have been a guy on him, but he would've had to break a tackle in that case, if they had peeled with him probably like they were supposed to.

Q: Vince made a good play obviously on that lateral, but is there some concern that a lot of your players didn't recognize it at first? Is it something that you'll try to drive home this week?

BB: We always try to drive that home. We always try to drive that home. That's one of those plays [where you say], 'Look get the ball and ask questions later.' With the way the rule is now, the down by contact rule, not that that was a down by contact play, but it's just another part of the loose ball rule, just get the ball and ask questions later. The whistle doesn't really mean anything anyway. Even if the whistle had blown, still if it was a lateral, it's a lateral and you have to get on the ball. Yes, we could do a better job on that. Coach it better, that's for sure.

Q: What did you see in Reche [Caldwell] that maybe San Diego or other teams didn't?

BB: I don't know. You'd have to talk to San Diego about Reche. He came in here last year and I thought he played well against us. We watched him. He's had a lot of good plays in his career. He's been injured some, but not this year. He's been very durable. He's a good receiver. He has good hands. He's quick. He can get open and catch the ball. I thought he had an opportunity to contribute here. Plus he's from Florida. It's like that's the criteria now for our receiving group.

Q: [Laughter] What will your scouts hand you today? How much of the work is done?

BB: We have personnel write-ups on each player. We have several games broken down, games that have been watched and put into our terminology and nomenclatures, the formations, the defense, the blitz, down and distance and all of that, so it can all be looked at and segmented. Then based on that, there will be other things that we'll want to do a further study on. I'm sure some of those will come up today and we'll keep digging into that as the week goes on.

Q: How far back will you go? Would you take every game this year and would you even go back further than that?

BB: Maybe, it's possible. I don't think necessarily every single play. I don't think we're going to look at 2500 plays, although somebody will probably watch them along the line. We'll pull some things out. If we feel like we need to go back and look at a certain segment, say it's short yardage. If we want to pull out all of the short yardage plays from the entire season, we'll pull them out. Again, that's time-consuming, so it's hard to say that with every single thing, to take every segment and break it down and watch every play. You get to the point where you have so much information. That's kind of the way it was with the Jets, just because we had all of the information. It wasn't even going back and getting it. We had it all. We had it from the first game, which was the second game of the year. That took care of preseason. Then we played them in November and that took care of September to November, and then we played them now, so that gave us, the last however many games that was, between the second game and

this one. That was an extensive body of work. So when you get to that point, you have to cut it down because you just have so many plays and so much information. They can't do all of that. That's what they did in the season. They can't do all of that in one game, so you have to figure out what you want to address and what you are aware of, that you just have to kind of let it ride.

Q: Is that a big part of today, figuring out what's relevant to your players and figuring out what you have to show them?

BB: Yeah, I think that's always important, is to try to get your players...because again, every team in this league has a pretty good scheme. If you look at enough games, you're going to see enough different things. If you start getting the players ready for something that they end up not doing then, in a way, that's counterproductive because you're sitting here [saying], 'Watch out for this. Watch out for that,' and the fact is, they're not going to do it against you because you didn't play like those teams played that they ran those plays against. You want to try to figure out...you can never figure it out, but you want to try to get somewhere into an area of, 'Look, this is what we have to defend. This is what we have to take care of. This is how we want to attack them,' and try to boil that down so that when the game actually comes, you're somewhere in that vicinity. The more of that other stuff that you bring in that really isn't going to be part of the game, it can end up hurting you more than it helps you.

Q: Do you focus on their offense against primarily 3-4 defenses or will you look at them against 4-3s?

BB: Again, I think there's relevance in both. Some 3-4s play a lot differently than ours. Some 4-3s actually play similar to our 3-4. It's more about spacing and the style of play. There's a lot of plays where a 3-4 is not on the field, third down, goal line, short yardage, situations like that. I doubt that we'd be in a 3-4 on third down. A team could be a 3-4 team, it doesn't really make any difference. When you're looking at third down, you're looking at how they're getting played on third down and how you want to play them. In other words, I think there's relevance in every game. There's very few games that I can think of that I've looked at and said, 'Well, that was a waste of time.' Maybe you're not getting a good look at one situation, but you're getting a good look at another down and distance situation or another personnel matchup or whatever.

Q: You were 100 percent focused on the Jets game. The minute it ends, does it take a while to shift and look ahead to San Diego? Is it difficult to do at times?

BB: I don't think it's difficult. That's what it is. It's the National Football League. When Indianapolis won Saturday, we knew if we won that our next game would be against San Diego. So we knew that as of Saturday night. We had done some preparation work on both teams. I told the people that are involved in that, obviously, to put the Baltimore stuff on the back burner and get out the San Diego stuff, and there were a few things that we furthered our analysis on with that. Then when the game was over, I took the San Diego stuff that we had and put that into a place where I could start to get familiar with it and look at it. That process started last night. Forget about the Jets. It doesn't mean anything right now. That game is in the books. It's done. It's time to move on, and believe me, we know what kind of challenge we have ahead of us. There's no point in looking back at that, other than to correct a few things, and to make sure that some of the things that we didn't do well in that game don't get repeated in the next game and cost us again. I'm not saying we can't learn anything from the game, but as far as sitting there spending a lot of time on it, I just think the time could be better spent getting familiar with the team that has the best record in the league right now. That's where we're heading.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS HEAD COACH BILL BELICHICK
POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE
January 7, 2007**

BB: It was real good to go out there and win today. I'm real proud of our team. I thought they stepped up and played some of the best football that we've played all year as a team in all three phases – special teams, covering those kicks, and offensively, third down, picking up the blitz, running the ball, defensively, I thought those guys played well. The Jets are a good football team. I give them a lot of credit. They certainly gave us all that we wanted today. All three games were very hard-fought. They're a physical team. They're a good football team. Eric [Mangini] has done a good job with that team. We were fortunate to win today. I think our players stepped up and just made a few more plays, and that was obviously the difference in the game. I'm really proud of the way they played and their toughness and their competitiveness. Now we're moving on to San Diego. We all know how good they are. We're going to have to continue to bring our A game to be competitive this time of year. We all know that. A lot of guys played well today. It would be hard to single anybody out, but as a team, I thought they really played well as units and we executed things, probably, some of the best things we've done all year.

Q: Can you talk about the Vince Wilfork fumble?

BB: It looked like they were trying to throw the bubble pass out there to the slot. It was clearly a lateral. I was standing almost right on the line of scrimmage. I definitely thought the ball was lateraled. [Rosevelt] Colvin got his hand on it and Vince made the smart play, which we always talk about, is get on the ball and ask questions later. It was disappointing to see him get run down from behind there. Obviously, that was a big turnover. Unfortunately we were only able to get three points out of it, but still, that was a big field position swing. It did give us a few more points there. It was a big play.

Q: Can you talk about starting the game, offensively, no huddle? How important was that for momentum?

BB: I thought it was important. The whole game was a little bit of a tempo game, both ways, on the line of scrimmage and getting players in and out. Both teams used timeouts on substitutions, and getting the calls and the communication was an issue all the way around. Tom [Brady], as always, does a great job managing that. We were able to punch some runs out there in the second quarter, in some of their sub defenses. I thought that opening drive was a big drive for us, obviously, to get on top and try to play the game from ahead, even though we eventually gave it back to them. That's certainly the way you want to start the game.

Q: Did playing no huddle early on force them to keep the same personnel on the field a little bit so you could create matchups there?

BB: Well, yeah, that's inherent in that, if you don't substitute, then they can't substitute either. Again, there's advantages and drawbacks to it. We wanted to go at a tempo where we could kind of control it and not get into as much of a matchup game, even though we wanted to play some of that, and we did play some of it, we were able to just control the tempo early in the game and that was something that we wanted to do.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about Jabar Gaffney and the day that he had?

BB: Jabar has done a good job for us all year. He came in here earlier in the season, about a quarter of the way through. He's learned all of the positions. He's played X. He's played Z.

He's played in the slot and he's a smart kid, a good route runner. He's done a great job of picking up the system. He works as hard as anybody. He's given us some quality plays this year. I was just happy for him and all of the receivers, the tight ends. Offensively we had a lot of production across the board, a lot of different guys. That's what you always like to see, is that kind of balance and good team execution.

Q: Other than better execution, what would you consider Tom's greater comfort level was this time than November 12th?

BB: Again, I just think we played better as a football team. We had better field position. We played better on defense. We had better protection. We ran the ball better. I think everybody played better. I think we did a better job in trying to play our game and do the things that we need to do. It wasn't perfect. The Jets give you a lot of things to worry about and they give you a lot of problems. I thought our tight ends and backs did a great job today in blitz pickup. They ran a lot of pressures and crisscrossed guys, moving them around before the snap, and coming from different spots, just to be able to sort all of that out and get them blocked was...Dante [Scarnecchia], Josh [McDaniels], the offensive coaches, Pete [Mangurian], Ivan [Fears], those guys did a great job of sorting all of that stuff out and being able to pick it up. The receivers, they obviously stepped up and made some plays today.

Q: Can you talk about Kevin [Faulk's] touchdown play? It seemed like the Jets blitzed up the middle and he was wide open.

BB: It looked like they missed the peel on it. I think somebody was probably supposed to peel with him on the blitz, kind of out of the backfield, and it looked like they must have missed it. I couldn't really see it. I was standing on the opposite side of the field. My guess is that they had somebody assigned to peel with him and he must have missed him.

Q: What did you say to Mangini after the game?

BB: Do you want to talk about the game? I'm not going to get into a postgame analysis here. Really, I've had enough of that.

Q: The photographers thought it was a big show.

BB: There were 80 people between me and Eric. I'm just trying to coach the team, that's all. I'm just trying to coach the team.

Q: Can you talk about Asante [Samuel's] interception play?

BB: We were in a coverage that was a little bit of a combination coverage and Asante kind of dropped back like he was going to cover the outside receiver. He made a great move and trapped the inside receiver breaking out. Asante has a great feel for doing things like that. He made a nice play on the ball and [had] a good run. It was a big play, but it was well executed by [Ray] Mickens, and Asante, and the safety. It was just well timed. Once again, the pressure upfront makes it tough, hopefully, for the quarterback and the receivers, to execute those deeper down the field throws, and I thought, really good pressure, too, on the pass rush.

Q: Do you have the luxury of taking any time to enjoy this win or do you have to turn the page pretty quickly here?

BB: I think we have to turn it pretty quick. I think that San Diego has pretty much led from start to finish here. You look at all of the ratings that you guys do every week and they're always

right up there, one or two. They've been there all year. They're the number one seed, so the best team in the AFC based on the regular season performance, and they deserve to be. They're good on defense. They're good on offense. They're good on special teams. They can score. They can stop you. They had a week's rest. I'm sure they're going to be ready to do. I have all the respect in the world for Marty [Schottenheimer] as a football coach. We don't have long, maybe a couple of hours here. We're going to have to go on the road and get back to work here against San Diego. They're tough.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS QUARTERBACK TOM BRADY
POSTGAME PRESS CONFERENCE
January 7, 2007**

Q: How big was your scoring drive after the Jets pulled within 7 points?

TB: Well, we had a few good drives. That was one of the most important. I think the drive before halftime was very important. Making it at the end there, after the touchdown to Kevin [Faulk], making it a 14-point game with about five minutes left, I wish we had done that a little bit earlier in the game. We weren't as effective in the red zone as we would have liked to have been. That is a very good red zone defense. That is a very good goal line defense. So, there were some critical drives in there. I think that one to Kevin was obviously the biggest of the game and then Asante [Samuel] got the interception return for the touchdown. That pretty much sealed it.

Q: What is the biggest reason for your greater comfort level this time versus November 12?

TB: Well, the weather was nice. You play on that crappy field before with a rain storm and you are throwing today with beautiful conditions. It was very un-Foxborough-like this time of year. I think we had a great plan. We had a great plan. This is a pressure defense and I think we were prepared much more for the pressure this time around. The guys really did a great job up front sorting out the pressures and allowing us to make a few plays down the field. It was just much better execution all the way around.

Q: What their a difference in protections?

TB: Yes, there were a few different things we did.

Q: Can you give an example?

TB: We just tried to protect a little more. The first time we played them, it was a lot of five guys out, a lot of four guys out. This was a little bit different. When you play Pittsburgh, you have to prepare for the blitz. I think when we played these guys today we were prepared for the blitz. And then if they decide to play coverage, then we adjust. But, for a team that blitzes 70 percent of the time, we really didn't realize that was the way it was going to be the first time around. We ended up throwing a lot of quick routes last game. We ended up just not being able to handle a lot of the pressures they were bringing. I think we were much better prepared.

Q: Can you talk about the game Jabar Gaffney had?

TB: He had a great day. He had a great week of practice. It was probably our best week of practice all year. Reche [Caldwell] had a great week. Jabar made a bunch of plays in practice and it ultimately carried over to the game. He was in a good spot to be able to catch the ball. He was the guy who was singled a lot out there. He really played well in his first playoff game ever.

Q: Why do you think he wasn't with a team in October? How did he adapt so quickly to this offense?

TB: Well, he has worked extremely hard. He fits in very well here because he is smart, he is tough, he loves playing football and he is very coachable. This isn't an easy offense for a receiver. So, over the course of eight or nine weeks he has really picked things up. He is playing really well for us. He made some really nice catches and we are definitely trying to get him the ball. Our offense is built around guys doing the right thing, being in the right place and for me trying to sort it out and find the guy who is going to be the most open. For the most part, I think we all did a pretty good job of that today.

Q: What was the advantage to controlling the tempo of the game?

TB: It got to be one of those games. I have never been in a game where it was like that. We were rushing to the line of scrimmage and rushing to run plays. I think at one point we ran the same play four times, and in my earphones Josh [McDaniels] said, "Run it again". So I get up there and I am going, "Okay, let's get up to the line".

Q: Were those the Kevin Faulk runs up the middle?

TB: Yes. And I think sometimes you get into a rhythm out there and you just try to make them stop it.

Q: Was this a mind game between the two coaching staffs?

TB: Probably. It was like they think we are going to do this, and we think they are going to react this way, so what do we think they are going to think when we think? It was just one of those days.

Q: As a quarterback, do you relish getting into these types of mind games?

TB: As a quarterback you always like when the defense is off balance. I think we were trying to do that and I think we were effective at times today doing that. I think we got into a situation where we were forcing them to get their stuff called and lined up the right way or else they were going to have a hard time stopping us. I think, at times, we really forced the issue on them. I don't think we have ever done it to that type of tempo, especially starting the game in no-huddle, which was a huge first series for us to go down and get ahead on them. Then we got down 10-7 and we kicked a field goal to [make it] 10-10, and the drive before the half was pretty critical going into the half up seven.

Q: Their philosophy last time was to get you out of rhythm. How aware of that were you?

TB: I think we just prepared very differently. Over the course of 16 games, here at this point in the year, the teams have really identified what they are going to do. You know their strengths. You know their weaknesses. You see how it has evolved over the course of 16 weeks. When we played them in the second game of the year, it was nothing like when we played them in week 10. In week 10, that was really when they started to kind of be the team they are today. So, when they played Minnesota, when they played Houston, when they played the Raiders, you see kind of how it all evolves and what they are doing well. We go into this game and say sure they could change it, but they have been playing pretty good defense doing what they are doing, so we are going to prepare for the stuff that they have been doing well. I think it was a much better approach for us.

Q: How did Faulk get so open on that touchdown?

TB: They were trying to blitz us and I think they just—we weren't really free releasing the halfback a whole lot. Kevin slipped out of there. It was probably miscommunication by them.

Q: Would Kerry Rhodes have been responsible for Faulk on that play?

TB: I don't know. There are ways they can do it. They can peel the end on him [or] Kerry can take him. Once again, we were going pretty quick, and we just got them in a spot that they probably didn't want to be in.

Q: It looked like both you and Daniel Graham had to be very patient on that touchdown play.

TB: Yes, they had him pretty well covered and I saw the linebacker had his head turned. He really couldn't see the ball and I tried to put it in a place where only Daniel could get it and Daniel made a great catch. Third-and-one there with no timeouts and 14 seconds left on the clock, you can't take a sack and you can't really run it because we didn't have timeouts. So, I think they probably were playing for the pass and they had it pretty well covered. They had Ben [Watson] covered in the flat. I just tried to put it up there and let the big guy make a big play for us.

Q: Why are the players in the locker room so confident in Stephen Gostkowski that he can handle the pressure of the playoffs?

TB: Well, you just have to trust that he is prepared and he wants to kick in this type of atmosphere. Nobody can do his job for him. We are all worried about doing our own job and executing what we need to. When a guy has to go out there and kick, you just hope that he does the best that he can do. He did great today.

Q: Is it too early for Shawne Merriman nightmares?

TB: Probably not. I have seen him play a bunch of other quarterbacks this year and he is one of the best in the league. We have our work cut out for us. I don't think we know a whole lot about this team besides LaDainian [Tomlinson] and Merriman. They have a bunch of great players so we have our hands full.

Q: How much do you relish this time of year?

TB: You put a lot into it. You put a lot into it over the course of five months of playing and three and a half months of training. I think when you are born, you are put on this earth and you have a certain skill set that helps you be ready for situations like this. We have a bunch of players who have come up over the years and trained to prepare for moments like this. It is about being focused, about working hard to prepare and not being overwhelmed by the situation. There is something in you that you just figure you can handle it. I am glad that we have the Tedy Bruschi and the Mike Vrabels and the Rosevelt Colvin and Richard Seymour, and you incorporate new guys into the mix like Jabar and Reche that have been so excited to get to this moment. It is very rewarding when it pays off. It is very rewarding when you lose to a team at home, really get outplayed, and then you come back and beat them by 21 points.

Q: Do you think you are playing your best football right now?

TB: Yes. I think definitely, no question. The defense has been playing great all year. Offensively, I think we have kind of found a nice identity. We know what our guys do really well, guys we have incorporated. We are running the ball really well and spreading the ball around to a bunch of different guys. The kicking game has really come a long and the return game has been great. So, we just have to keep it going.

Q: Was this a day about being patient?

TB: Yes, being patient and being efficient. I think the positive thing today was we kept going forward. I don't think there were too many times where we had a bunch of negative plays. The sack that I took in the red zone wasn't very smart of me. But, there weren't a whole lot of negative plays. When you can keep those third downs manageable-- I think we were pretty good on third down today, too. It was just good execution and really trying to keep the pressure on that defense.



NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

Postgame Quotes

January 7, 2007



Vince Wilfork, Defensive Lineman

(On when he realized the lateral was a fumble)

[Not] until I picked it up. Once I got it in my hands, I looked over to the sidelines and they were saying, 'Go, go, go' and I was like, 'Okay.' That's when I started running, but I didn't know that it was a fumble. I knew it had a good chance of being one, so that's why I at least had it in my hands. If it was one, I would have got tackled right there, but we still would have had the ball.

(On the run after the fumble)

Yeah, I had to turn on the speed, a little speed. I didn't show you guys all of that. If I had run when I was supposed to run I probably would have gotten into the end zone, but one of those little guys caught me. I still don't know who caught me.

(On the coach telling you to jump on the ball and ask questions later)

Exactly. And it was funny, because [Richard] Seymour, it was hitting his leg, so I said, 'Man, let me get this ball.' He walked right over it, and I was like, 'Thank you.' I just saw the ball on the ground. Any time the ball is on the ground, pick it up, and that's what I did. I don't know if I heard a whistle or didn't hear a whistle. At least I had the ball, that's what I was most concerned about. Pick it up and let the referees decide whether it was a fumble or a forward pass or whatever. You obviously play to the whistle but sometimes I don't even hear the whistle.

(On the TV cameras not showing his run)

I don't care. I have that ball and I'm going to take that ball home, as a matter of fact, so it doesn't matter.

(On the Chargers)

Hands-down the best team in the NFL, hands-down. It's going to be a tough challenge. I think all three phases of the game – defense, special teams, and the offense – they have weapons everywhere. So in order for us to win that game we have to bring our 'A' game. [If we play a] 'A-minus' or a 'B' game, we will lose that game. It's going to be a long week, a tough week. We have to prepare like we did today for the last game and I think we will be okay. It will be an exciting football game, it will be a dog fight. There will be a lot of emotions going into that game, it will be a high-intensity game. Right now we just have to enjoy this game for a couple more hours and then get started on San Diego.

(On whether or not his ankle bothered him on the fumble return)

Not at all. I didn't know how it was going to feel going in --it was my first game back-- but it held up pretty good. So that's a good sign.

(On making sure to hold onto the ball once he picked it up)

I would hate to get the ball and fumble it. I would be the laughingstock of this locker room, so I had to cover up. I look at Kevin Faulk and those guys handling the ball, so I have a little ball security.

(On the feeling of running down the field)

I don't even know the feeling. I just saw the end zone and said, "Man, that's a long way!" I tried my best [to score] but we had the turnover, that gave our offense a short field to work with. We came out of that with points. It would have been lovely if I would have gotten [the score], but at least we got some points out of it.

(On running the ball at all before Sunday)

In high school I was a big-time fullback. But it was my first time running the ball in the NFL and in college. I'll look at film of myself and critique myself.

(On what he will do with the ball)

It's going into the trophy case. I don't know what I'm going to write on it, I'm going to have my son help me and my wife help me [figure out] what I'm going to write on the ball.

(On being back on the field)

I hated turning on the TV and seeing my team play. I wanted to support them. I just didn't know how to feel, me being home while the team is out there sweating and getting bloody and I'm home looking at the football game. I was eager to get back, but I did a great job of treating the ankle and [the trainers] did a great job of working with me. They know how hard I can be on them sometimes, but I really followed their lead and they got me back out there.

(On when he got the word that he was going to play)

Like I told you guys earlier this week, 'If I can play, I'm going to play.' I went out there and it felt good.

(On limited playing time)

Mike Wright has been so good that we feel like we can rotate. That's a positive thing. It's going to take me a little while to get back [to 100 percent]. I'm already back doing the conditioning but three weeks off without running in a while.

(On if there is motivation from the last time the Patriots and Jets played)

We looked at that game so much that I got tired of looking at it. They did some things in that game that should have never happened. In that game we didn't do things that we usually do well. That's why Bill [Belichick] showed us the tape all the time.

Daniel Graham, Tight End

(On the win)

This is the playoffs. We're here at home. We didn't want to go home early. Our goals are still in front of us.

(On playing the Jets for a third time)

We didn't want to come out and play like we did last time. We stuck together and stayed close. We played our game plan today and played a good game. We will celebrate this for a few days and then move on.

(On the improved protection for Tom Brady)

We just sat back and were patient during their blitzes and just picked them up when they came up. Our coaches put together a great game plan to stop the blitz that they were throwing at us.

(On pass distribution)

Tom [Brady] has been harping all year that if we get open he's going to get us the ball. Today it was Jabar's [Gaffney] day. He has been making big catches for us since he got here. The comfort level with him is there and it's peaking at the right time.

(On getting the ball to the open receiver)

He showed today that whoever gets open, Tom [Brady] is going to get him the ball.

(On comfort level with Stephen Gostkowski)

We're confident in him. We know that he's going to go out there and put points up when he's called upon. I think he is prepared [for the pressure]. Whenever he is called upon, I think he will be ready. You either have confidence in him or you don't and we all have confidence in him.

Kevin Faulk, Running Back

(On sharing time with Maroney and Dillon and using their strengths)

We have so many weapons on offense that you have to pick and choose and when it's your turn you just have to go in and do your job.

(On how much better the team has to play next week against the Chargers)

A lot better, and it is going to be totally different. They are going to be real different and you just have to go out there knowing you have to play them tough no matter what.

(On how important it is to score a touchdown over settling for a field goal)

As long as we win, it doesn't matter what it says on the scoreboard. You can come in the next day and work on the mistakes you had, but during the course of the game you just have to go with the flow. In regards to the last touchdown in the game, I think it didn't mean any more than other touchdowns in the game.

Rosevelt Colvin, Linebacker

(On if the team played at their highest level today)

We did some things well, but we did some things that we need to fix, such as the penalties on both sides of the ball. As far as going out being physical and executing the game plan we set out all week long, I think the guys played well and this is definitely the time when you want to play your best football. However, we definitely have to play better because next week we are playing the best team in the NFL.

(On forcing the other team to kick field goals in the red zone)

Everyone tries to stay disciplined and tries to continue to do the things the coaching staff asks of us. Every defensive stand is not going to be perfect and there are going to be situations when they make a play, because they get paid too. We just need to continue to grind it out and do the things we are supposed to do. Someone is either going to make a play or their going to come up on third down and miss a play.

(On Vince Wilfork's fumble recovery)

I thought it was a forward pass and incomplete, but luckily Vince Wilfork scooped it up and it was a big turning point of the game. The offense got a field goal out of it and it was definitely good to stop them. I was definitely surprised and I was upset with myself because it was a game changing play, just like Asante Samuel's pick to the end zone. I think it was definitely an opportunity when we could of gotten a touchdown off it.

Asante Samuel, Cornerback

(On interception)

He throws the ball kind of soft. I was kind of timid a couple times to go after it. I knew if he kept throwing it out there, I was going to get it. When I caught it and I looked, I expected someone to be there in my face and once I kept running I saw that there was no one there and I just kept running.

(On Vince Wilfork's fumble return)

That was a rumbling, stumbling, tumbling return. I love to see those guys get the ball in their hands. They have all those stories about how they used to play running back and all that, so it's good.

(On playing the Jets)

We know them but they run a complex offense to try to confuse you, a lot of motion, a lot of shifting. Coach [Belichick] prepared us for that and we just went out and played. We executed better and we played a lot more physical.

(On San Diego)

We have to go play a whole lot better than we played today. We had a couple mental errors, and a couple big plays. They're physical. They beat us up and down the field [the last time we played]. It was kind of like an NFL team versus a college team. We just have to go out and play physical.

(On LaDainian Tomlinson)

He's a great guy, explosive. That's one of those guys I'm sure we'll be game-planning for because if you don't and you sit back, he'll gas you like he does everyone else.

(On the chance this is his last game at Gillette Stadium as a Patriot)

I'm not thinking about that. If it is, then it is. It is what it is. I'm just trying to go out and play football and make the best of my situation.

Artrell Hawkins, Safety

(On why the defense is so good at forcing field goals in the Red Zone)

It was a bend but don't break philosophy. We don't even want to give up field goals, to be quite honest, but there are going to be situations sometimes because they are talented people. Their quarterback is good and was the Comeback Player of the Year and they're going to drive the ball and we don't like that and [would] rather [they] not be in the end zone at all.

(On the red zone defense throughout the year)

We have been fortunate and have executed and done the things we needed to do in the red zone. We were the number two red zone defense coming into the game and that just goes to show you the bend and don't break mentality we have. When we are on the 1-yard line we feel like they don't have to get it in and never concede anything and fight to the very end.

Reche Caldwell, Wide Receiver

(On success of the offense)

I think we ran the ball a lot better, threw a lot of short passes, and I think the offensive linemen did a great job of protecting so we could get the ball down the field. I think [Josh McDaniels] had a great game out there. They brought every kind of blitz and we had a great scheme of picking it up, so it really wasn't big pressure for us. We did a great job of picking it up.

(On next week's game against the Chargers)

It's a great team. It's going to be a good game. They have the best rusher in the league, they have the best record in the league, and they're probably the best team in the league right now, so it's going to be an exciting matchup and I'm looking forward to going out there and playing hard and trying to get another win.

(On playing his former team)

It's just another game; there are a lot of guys that move around in this league and play their old teams so it's just another game. We just want to go out there and play like we played today and try to come out with a victory, but it's going to be tough.

(On Tom Brady being any different today)

He's been great all year. Brady stepped up. When we need key plays he makes them. Even if he had to run, whatever it takes to get us into position to win the ballgame, that's what, when he's out there, he's going to do.

(On the development of the new players since the beginning of the year)

I think we're clicking now. Jabar [Gaffney] did a great job. I think he had over 100 yards in a playoff game, so I think he did a great job in the passing game. I think we're just improving each week and it's showing on Sunday.

(On the importance of long drives Sunday)

Very important, because they have an explosive offense, explosive receivers, and they do a good job of moving the ball up the field. So we tried to keep them off the field as much as possible. They can score real quick, but we want to control the game, throw the ball, run the ball, get short passes, keep the clock moving, and score points and I think we did a great job of that today.

(On last year's meeting with the Chargers, in which Caldwell played for San Diego)

Everybody was hurt [on the Patriots]. The whole team was hurt, so it was a lot easier. But the Chargers are a good team, [they have] one of the best running backs probably ever to play the game, they have a lot of young talent, they make plays, so it's going to be a tough game. But if we go out there and execute and play well, I think we have a good chance to win.

Tedy Bruschi, Linebacker

(On the fumble by Chad Pennigton)

We were talking on the sidelines that it was about time we created a turnover to break the game open. That was a play that half of us knew what was going on and the other half didn't. We didn't know if it was a lateral or a forward pass and it was a heads up play by Vince Wilfork to pick up the ball and play till someone blew the whistle.

(On how different it is to play the Chargers than playing the Jets)

It's a football game and we need to play our best game. We will go out there tomorrow to make sure we play our best ball and we will see how it goes next Sunday.

(On red zone defense)

We have been playing good in the red zone all year. Being able to hold them to field goals and not giving them the seven points, it gives us and the offense a lift and being able to score another touchdown only puts us up even more.

Benjamin Watson, Tight End

(On Brady)

He's the field general. He calls the protections. I can't emphasize enough the job the line did to give him protection so he had time to hit his guys down field. He never sits down when we're off the field and he's always rallying the troops. He's a fiery guy and a great competitor. He was locked in from the beginning. He lets us hear it when we don't do stuff right but it's constructive and we know he just wants to win. When I was in college, he was out here winning Super Bowls, so there's no quarterback I'd rather have.

(On being better prepared)

It's one thing when you go into a game and a team surprises you with what they're doing and you don't have any answers for it. But this time we had a couple answers.

(On long drives)

I think it's important to grind them into the ground and get their defense tired. It was big to take time off the clock. It felt like the third quarter went by so fast because we had the ball. We can go in and drive the ball down and later in the game we know we can pound them.

(On San Diego's Defense)

Their defense is really good and it's going to be a challenge. I think the last time we played them, we didn't fair too well against their defense so its going to present a big challenge for our offense.

(On Jabar Gaffney)

He got a lot of balls in practice. We just get out here and it kind of happens. It's so unpredictable. There are so many different things that contribute to it and it just happened to be him this week.

Artrell Hawkins, Safety

(On the Vince Wilfork fumble recovery)

I was in the middle of the field but I didn't see if it was a forward or a backwards pass. I saw Rosie [Colvin] knock it down and run to the middle of the field and all of a sudden it was a great play by Vince. He picks it up. He was aware of the situation. I saw what was happening but I was thinking they were throwing a bubble screen, then there's going to be a double pass. I was going through my reads. I'm making sure the wide receivers are blocking and not slipping through. Vince can run, people would be surprised. He's a better athlete than everyone standing here [laughs]. He can catch punts, he can run. Vince is a very good athlete.

(On Jet's game-plan)

I expected there to be a little more trickeration, halfback passes or reverse passes. That kind of held true to what they do other than the fact that they brought in and played 10

personnel with four receivers quite a bit which they haven't done that much. They didn't take as many shots down the field as I imagined they would have. Maybe it was because of how we played

(On the Jerricho Cotchery touchdown)

I was deep, came up, and missed the tackle. I feel like we're always in the right coverage because no matter what they call, you have to play it.

(On the chess match between the two teams)

We've seen them on tape. We know they do it. We know they would go no huddle so we couldn't substitute.

Ty Warren, Defensive Lineman

(On the lateral knocked down by Rosevelt Colvin and recovered by Vince Wilfork)

It was a real short throw. He tried to throw it out on a swing pass and I saw that Rosevelt [Colvin] had batted the ball. I was going to congratulate him, but of course Rosey was 50 yards down the field telling everybody what he did. [Laughter] So, then I saw Vince [Wilfork] running down the field and I was like, 'What is going on?' Then I saw Bill [Belichick] giving the gesture like, 'keep going.' It was kind of funny. It was a good heads-up play by [Wilfork]. It definitely was a good play in the game. We took advantage of it and scored points. It was important at that point to put points on the board. Whenever you can put points on the board it's a plus.

(On what the team can take from playing the San Diego Chargers last season)

What we did in the past doesn't matter. That's a different team. I think what we're going to do collectively as a team is get in those meeting rooms, listen to what the coaches have for us, and do the preparation that we need to this week in practice and in the meeting rooms. Then apply that during the week in practice and on the field on Sunday.

Ellis Hobbs, Cornerback

(On the emotions of wearing a t-shirt that read 'Darrent Williams R.I.P.' during the game)

I had all the emotions that I wanted before this. This just gave me a purpose to go out there. I asked the Lord, 'Let him play through me.' I know how bad he wanted it on the field with his aggressive attitude. I can say that we're the same type of player. I respected him and he respected me. I'm not [wearing the shirt] to show off. I was doing it out of respect.

(On avoiding dangerous situations off the field)

You can't go out with the same type of people that you used to run with. You have to pick and choose who are your friends, who your real friends are. It's easy to decipher who they are. When I go home, I told my mother that when the sun goes down I'm inside. I'm inside somewhere. I'm not driving around or anything like that.

(On how to change the atmosphere at home)

You don't try to drop your old friends. What you have to do is get them on your program. Let them understand that we're in a different situation now. If you want to be around me ... They have to understand that you're not in the same light anymore. There are things that I can't do.

(On if you're challenged more as a professional athlete)

Most definitely. They want to see ... The thing on the street is 'keeping it real.' They want to see if you're going to be the same person that you were. What they have to understand is that you have so much on the line.

Richard Seymour, Defensive Lineman

(On Vince Wilfork's return after the fumble recovery)

It would have been a rumble but I would have been in the end zone. That was a heads-up play by [Vince] Wilfork and [Rosevelt] Colvin. I think it was something that broke the game open for us. I saw it between his legs but I saw Rosey running up the field like the play was over. I reacted off of him. I didn't even see Vince pick the ball up. By the time that I turned around and looked around, he was down the field with a guy hanging off of him. He rumbled and rumbled and rumbled, but if I picked it up it would have been over. [Laughter]

(On ability to control the Jets offense)

Going into this week I think it was a game about being patient. You look at the Jets and their offense is about ball control – dink and dunk, control the clock, throw in some runs and some quick passes. Defensively, if you're not patient you can get frustrated. It's the type of offense that can frustrate you. For us it was about being patient and making the play when your number was called. We were fortunate enough to make more plays than them today. It was a big win.

(On facing the San Diego Chargers offense)

We haven't started to break down the tape on those guys. Obviously they're a talented football team -- one of the best in the league, if not the best. We are definitely going to have our hands full. If you look just at their offense, they have a Pro Bowl quarterback and probably the best running back in the game. We have our work cut out for us.