

Pats don't need big-name receivers

New England doesn't boast stable of Pro Bowlers

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INDIANAPOLIS

Indianapolis has Marvin Harrison and Reggie Wayne. New England has Jabar Gaffney and Reche Caldwell.

While the Colts deploy Pro Bowl, big-money wide receivers, the Patriots have their own recipe for success: find unwanted pass catchers and turn them into household names.

Remember Deion Branch and David Givens?

It doesn't seem to matter who lines up at receiver for the Patriots; quarterback Tom Brady will find the open man.

"I don't think you need a big-name receiver," Colts linebacker Gary Brackett said. "I think guys out there have a great approach. Guys are going to get open, and they have been consistent over there and have made a ton of plays."

Gaffney caught 11 passes during the regular season. In his first two postseason games of his career, he has recorded two 100-yard receiving games and leads the Patriots with 18 receptions for 207 yards.

Caldwell has caught 12 passes for 130 yards and two touchdowns in the postseason and is coming off a career year.

BY THE NUMBERS

Here is a statistical comparison of receiving yards between Colts and Patriots players this season:

Player	Rec.	Yds.	TD
Harrison, Ind.	95	1,366	12
Wayne, Ind.	86	1,310	9
Caldwell, NE	61	760	4
Watson, NE	49	643	3
Brown, NE	43	384	4
Utecht, Ind.	37	377	0
Clark, Ind.	30	367	4
Faulk, NE	43	356	2

Not too many people saw this coming.

Caldwell's career high in receptions was 28 heading into this season. He became surplus goods in San Diego and wasn't re-signed this offseason. The Patriots picked him up as a free agent, and Caldwell led the Patriots with 61 receptions and 760 yards during the regular season.

Gaffney, a former second-round draft pick, spent his first four seasons with Houston. In the offseason he signed a free-agent contract with Philadelphia. Gaffney failed to impress the Eagles' coaching staff and was released after the preseason. New Eng-

land picked up the former Florida Gator and added him to their stable of receivers.

After letting Branch, a Super Bowl MVP, go to Seattle because he wanted a pay raise and after watching Givens bolt to Tennessee for a lucrative contract, many critics questioned whether the Patriots had the offensive weapons to be competitive.

Those questions have been answered, and Colts defenders give all the credit to Brady.

"Tom does an excellent job distributing the ball and just controlling the offense," Colts cornerback Jason David. "Earlier on in the season a lot of critics were saying, 'Well, he doesn't have the receivers that he had'; but being the leader and good quarterback that he is, he's finding a way to get the ball to those guys."

Despite the roster turnover, the one constant in the Patriots' receiving corps is veteran Troy Brown, who has spent 14 seasons with New England. Brown is a possession-type receiver and known more for his recent iron-man duty (also playing some at cornerback) than his receiving duties.

Brady also utilizes his tight ends and running backs in the aerial attack.

Tight end Benjamin Watson finished second on the team with 49 catches for 643 yards. Also,

running backs Kevin Faulk and Laurence Maroney pose a threat out of the backfield.

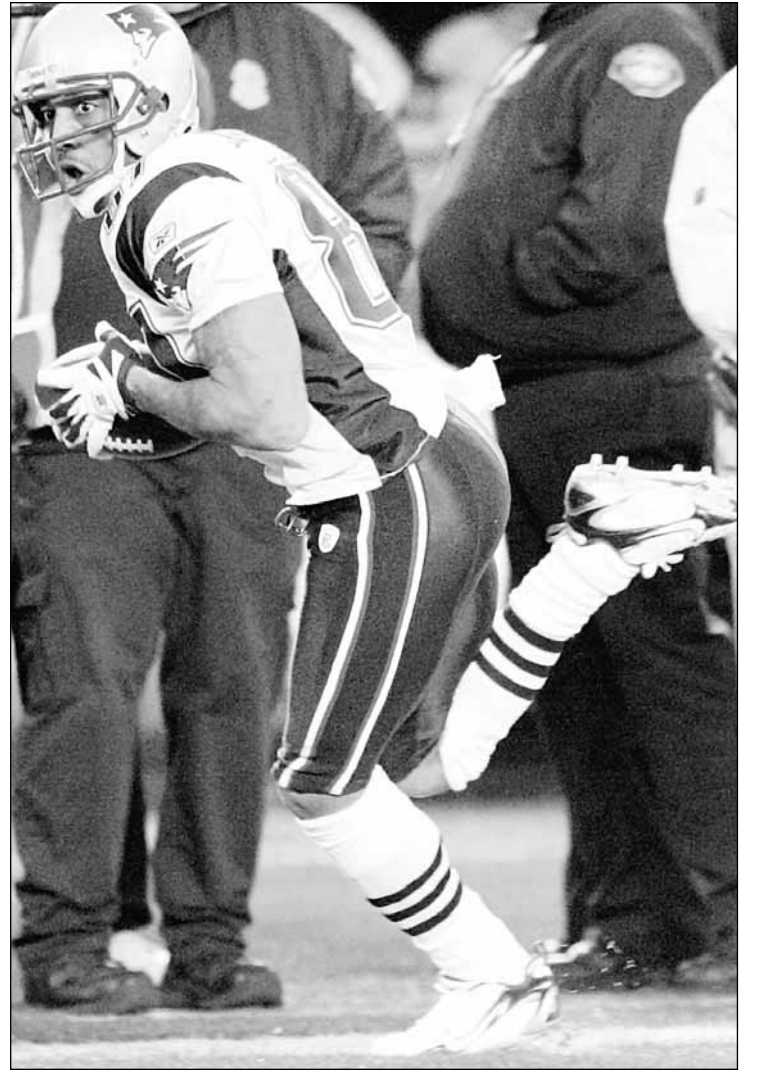
"They have a lot of possession receivers, and some of them can go down field," safety Antoine Bethea said. "He spreads the ball out real well, so it's not really one player that you can really focus on."

The Colts and Patriots met Nov. 5, and the Colts defense forced Brady into four interceptions. Colts defensive back Nick Harper said Brady's confidence in his receivers makes him susceptible to creating turnovers.

"He will throw you some," Harper said. "No quarterback is perfect. Sometimes he tends to throw the ball into coverage, regardless of whether you're on the guy or not. I guess he feels like all his receivers are better than the defensive backs."

If the Colts are going to force Brady into mistakes, it's going to have to start with the defensive line. Getting pressure on Brady will be key for the Colts, or else Brady will have no problem finding his group of no-name receivers.

"As a defensive line, it's on us," Colts defensive lineman Raheem Brock said. "We have to get to him. He's a great quarterback. History has shown he's a great quarterback; and if we don't hit Brady, he'll pick a defense apart."



Patriots wide receiver Reche Caldwell hauls in a catch to set up the winning field goal during an AFC divisional playoff game against San Diego on Sunday.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

Here is a look at players likely to see the field for the Colts in Sunday's AFC Championship Game:

OFFENSE

- Peyton Manning, QB
- Marvin Harrison, WR
- Reggie Wayne, WR
- Joseph Addai, RB
- Dominic Rhodes, RB
- Bryan Fletcher, FB
- Dallas Clark, TE
- Ben Utecht, TE
- Tarik Glenn, LT
- Ryan Lilja, LG
- Jeff Saturday, C
- Jake Scott, RG
- Ryan Diem, RT

DEFENSE

- Robert Mathis, LE
- Dwight Freeney, RE
- Nick Harper, CB
- Jason David, CB
- Marlin Jackson, CB
- Antoine Bethea, SS
- Bob Sanders, FS
- Anthony McFarland, LT
- Raheem Brock, RT
- Gilbert Gardner, SLB
- Gary Brackett, MLB
- Rob Morris, MLB
- Cato June, WLB

SPECIAL TEAMS

- Adam Vinatieri, K
- Hunter Smith, P
- Terrence Wilkins, PR/KR
- Justin Snow, LS

Mr. Cool

Pressure of being best clutch kicker in the NFL not getting to Adam Vinatieri

STORY BY RICK MORWICK ■ ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

INDIANAPOLIS

Adam Vinatieri padded around Colts headquarters Wednesday afternoon in flip-flops, sporting an unshaven face and looking about as uptight as a vacationer on a cruise.

Then again, when does the greatest clutch kicker in NFL history ever appear unnerved?

So far, never. Perfect in the playoffs for the Indianapolis Colts, Vinatieri's right foot and unflappable nerve have become nearly as valuable to the AFC South champions as Peyton Manning's right arm and patented cool.

Just ask them. "We're calling him 'Mr. Perfect' so far," cornerback Nick Harper said. "We're going to keep it that way until he proves otherwise."

Dwight Freeney put it another way. "Adam is amazing when it comes down to clutch in the playoffs," the defensive end said. "We are blessed to have him."

For his part, Vinatieri is glad to be in Indianapolis. And he embraces, not dreads, Sunday's AFC Championship Game against his former team, he said.

Vinatieri spent the first 10 years of his NFL career with the Patriots. He booted game-winning field goals in two Super Bowls and, not surprisingly, still has a wealth of former teammates as friends.

Periodically, he stays in touch with them. But this week, he's cut off all contact.

"We'll be friends long after football's done. But this week, there's really nothing to talk with them (about)," said Vinatieri, who signed as a free agent with the Colts during the offseason. "They're preparing for their game, and

we're preparing for ours. "We'll be friends long after this week, but this week, it's not about being friends. It's about winning football games."

Vinatieri has certainly done his part to keep the Colts winning in the playoffs.

He contributed three field goals in a 23-8 wild-card win against Kansas City. And he tallied all of the Colts' points with five field goals during last week's 15-6 AFC divisional playoff victory at Baltimore.

Against the Ravens, he connected from distances of 35, 48, 51, 42 and 43 yards in less-than-ideal conditions in a pressure-packed outdoor environment.

His playoff perfection, 8 for 8 so far, has only reaffirmed what the Colts thought all along when they signed him away from the Patriots: that he is a difference-maker, especially in the postseason.

"You always want to score touchdowns," Colts coach Tony Dungy said. "But you can win a game with two field goals just as easily as you can with one touchdown."

"It is great to have Adam on our sideline, and we feel good about having him." Vinatieri relishes the chance to get back to the Super Bowl but appreciates the irony that it might happen at the expense of his former team, possibly courtesy of his right foot.

"It's interesting. It's a fun situation," said Vinatieri, who was 25 of 28 on field-goal attempts during the regular season for 113 points. "Looking back at the beginning of the year, to have these two teams playing together at the end, it's fun."

The fourth-most accurate field-goal kicker in NFL history, Vinatieri has made 19 game-winning field goals in the final minute or in overtime dur-

ing his 11-year career.

He was brought in specifically to avoid what happened last season, when Mike Vanderjagt, trying to force overtime, badly missed a 46-yard attempt on the final play of a divisional playoff loss against Pittsburgh in the RCA Dome.

With Vinatieri, the Colts have significantly more confidence in their kicker if they need a field goal to win a game.

"Adam's a great kicker," tight end Ben Utecht said. "When we're put in a situation where we need three points, we really have a lot of faith that he's going to put those points on the board."

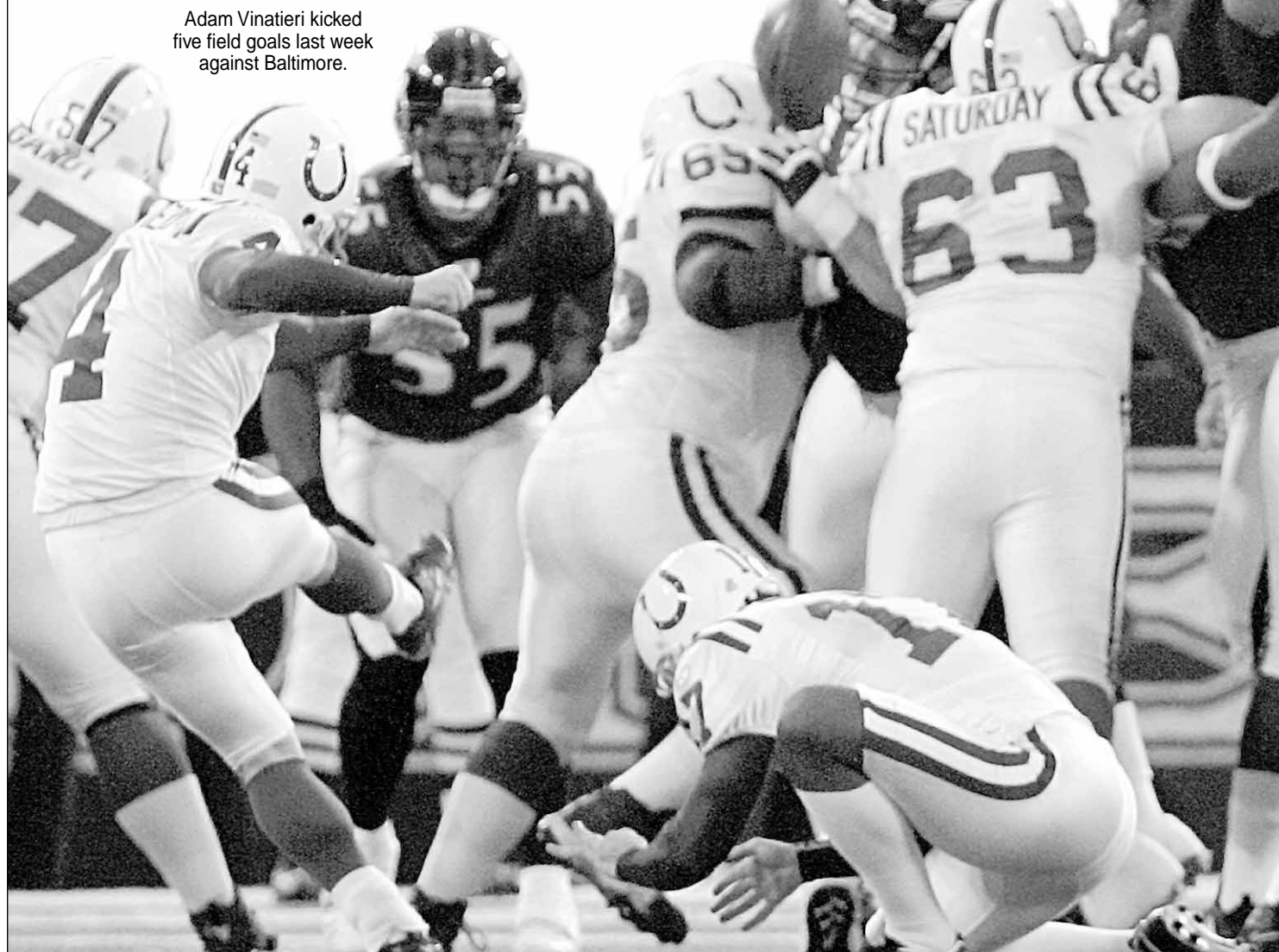
"It's the same feeling I have when I'm out there with Peyton Manning. You just have faith in a guy that's going to get the job done."

If Sunday's showdown comes down to a final kick, Vinatieri is confident, as always, he'll get the job done.

He's not necessarily wishing for the chance, but he won't shy away from it if it comes.

"I want to win. That's all I care about," Vinatieri said. "If I get that opportunity, great. If I'm on the sideline cheering on our defense to hold their offense so we can win, great. It doesn't matter."

"You prepare like you're going to be out there a bunch, and if that happens, that's great. And if not, you stand on the sideline and you cheer a bunch."



Adam Vinatieri kicked five field goals last week against Baltimore.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

Here is a look at players likely to see the field for the Patriots in Sunday's AFC Championship Game:

OFFENSE

- Tom Brady, QB
- Reche Caldwell, WR
- Jabar Gaffney, WR
- Troy Brown, WR
- Corey Dillon, RB
- Laurence Maroney, RB
- Heath Evans, FB
- Benjamin Watson, TE
- Daniel Graham, TE
- Matt Light, LT
- Logan Mankins, LG
- Dan Koppen, C
- Stephen Neal, RG
- Nick Kaczur, RT

DEFENSE

- Ty Warren, LE
- Vince Wilfork, NT
- Richard Seymour, RE
- Roosevelt Colvin, LOLB
- Mike Vrabel, LILB
- Tully Banta-Cain, RILB
- Tedy Bruschi, ROLB
- Asante Samuel, CB
- Ellis Hobbs, CB/KR
- Ray Mickens, CB
- James Sanders, SS
- Artrell Hawkins, FS

SPECIAL TEAMS

- Stephen Gostkowski, K
- Josh Miller, P
- Kevin Faulk, PR
- Lonie Paxton, LS