



AFC Championship Game: New England Patriots at Indianapolis Colts

Time: 6:30 p.m. Sunday TV: WISH-Channel 8 Radio: WFBQ-94.7 FM



# Quarterbacks in spotlight

## Teammates: Manning's legacy shouldn't be primary concern

By Eddie Pells  
The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS

Jim Kelly or Troy Aikman. Fran Tarkenton or Terry Bradshaw. Dan Fouts or Joe Montana. Dan Marino or John Elway.

A few years from now, Peyton Manning will be forever placed into one category of the NFL's greatest quarterbacks: those who have won Super Bowls and those who haven't. He's got to get there first, though, and his next chance is coming soon.

Will the Colts-Patriots game Sunday amount to a defining moment, an all-or-nothing opportunity for Manning, who is currently The Greatest Quarterback to Never Make a Super Bowl? If he wins, maybe history will see it that way. If he doesn't, well, certainly he'll have other chances. Won't he?

His coach and teammates hate that it always seems to come to this.

"It's totally unfair to him," tight end Dallas Clark said. "He has his job to do, and he can't do anything else. It's sad, but that's why you guys do what you do. He handles it great. He's a professional."

Manning was not available for interviews Wednesday. The Colts chose to delay his availability until Friday, when he'll undoubtedly offer the candid, introspective, realistic thoughts on the subject that he has repeated many times in his nine years in the NFL.

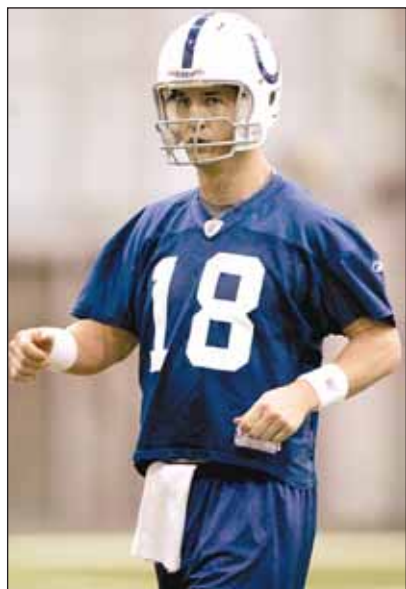
It's a career filled with records, Pro Bowls, MVP awards. But he is 5-6 in the playoffs, with an 0-2 record against New England's Tom Brady, the less-spectacular quarterback who has always been best when the stakes have been the highest. Brady is 12-1 in the playoffs with three Super Bowl rings.

Brady entered the league as a back-up, a sixth-round draft pick in 2000 and the kind of player who comes with no hype or expectations.

Manning was the first pick of the 1998 draft, the kind of player who has "legacy" attached to his name before he takes a snap.

"I don't know that he'll be judged against Tom Brady," Colts coach Tony Dungy said. "But every quarterback will be judged against Joe Montana and Terry Bradshaw and Bart Starr and guys who have won Super Bowls. That's the way it is."

"I think we have appreciation now for Dan Marino and Boomer Esiason and Dan Fouts and guys who haven't won it. But at the time, we talk about



Colts quarterback Peyton Manning prepares to work out at the Colts' practice facility in Indianapolis on Wednesday.

how many Super Bowls you've won. As time goes by, history is a little easier on you."

Manning, of course, is hoping he won't need friendly historians to cement his legacy. A Super Bowl ring is the easiest, maybe the only, way to avoid that.

Funny thing is that he finds himself on the cusp of the Super Bowl again — Manning's second appearance in the AFC Championship Game — after a most un-Peyton-like run through the playoffs.

He has 438 yards in two games, fewer than he recorded in his second playoff blowout against the Broncos in 2004. He has one touchdown pass and five interceptions. His quarterback rating is 58.3.

Yet just as he has struggled, the defense that has often derailed Indy's Super Bowl hopes has also been uncharacteristic, allowing only a single touchdown and an average of 63.5 rushing yards in two games.

"The NFL has a funny way of highlighting the quarterbacks, like it's Peyton versus Brady," defensive end Dwight Freeney said. "That's all right for the media, the fans and the game, but there's a lot more going on out there than just two quarterbacks going at it."

Dungy insists that there is no extra pressure on his quarterback.

"I think it's the same thing at stake for him as there is for all of us," Dungy said.

## Cooperative effort with coach helps Brady lead the Patriots

By Howard Ulman  
The Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass.

On Tuesdays, Tom Brady meets privately with Bill Belichick for an hour or two, talking football and other subjects.

On Sundays, they usually win. "There's no coach I'd rather play for," the New England Patriots quarterback said Wednesday.

"There's no quarterback I'd rather have," his coach said after the latest victory.

The members of that mutual admiration society smiled broadly at each other on the field Sunday, moments after New England advanced to the AFC Championship Game with a 24-21 comeback win against San Diego.

Whether that scene will be repeated in Indianapolis this Sunday could depend on the bond they've developed, a relationship that has led to three Super Bowl titles in the past five seasons and a chance for another this season.

They may seem like an odd couple: a handsome, 28-year-old dimple-chinned quarterback who dated actress Bridget Moynahan and appears on magazine covers; and a 54-year-old football junkie who wears gray sweatshirts and a scowl when asked a question he'd rather not answer.

But their focus on their jobs and their determination to win draw them together.

"Bill?" Brady said when asked about their relationship. "That may be the first time I've ever called him Bill. It's very good with coach Belichick. As I've said before, we have the same goals."

The Patriots don't practice on Tuesdays, and that gives them time to get together.

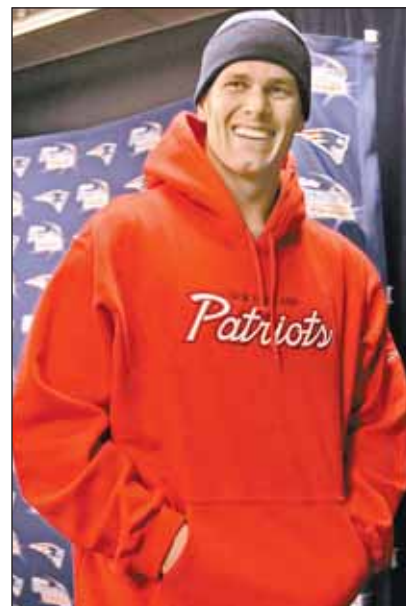
"Sometimes it's all football," Brady said. "Sometimes we talk about other stuff. We've been doing that for four years."

"It's a great relationship. Usually in the afternoon, we meet and we discuss how last week went, how we see this week going."

The emphasis, though, is on the upcoming game. They don't think celebrating a win or lamenting a loss two days after it occurred helps much against the next opponent.

Belichick, Brady said, is consistent in his mood, and that's good for the players.

"He's never up and down," Brady said. "He's just always kind of the same whether you win or lose. (He says)



New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady leaves a news conference in Foxborough, Mass., on Jan. 10.

"We've always got to do this better. You've always got to do things good."

The quarterback with two Super Bowl MVP awards certainly can do better against the Colts. He threw three interceptions in San Diego but was bailed out by several instances of poor judgment by the Chargers.

The costliest one came when safety Marlon McCree intercepted a ball on fourth down with under seven minutes left and the Chargers ahead 21-13 when they still could have gotten the ball if he knocked it down. Instead, he fumbled the ball away on the return.

Indianapolis has allowed just 14 points in two playoff games and is playing perhaps its best defense of the season.

Brady, though, never gives up.

"He's a field general, man," Patriots cornerback Ellis Hobbs said. "Even if he's not having an up-to-par game in his eyes, he has the ability, somehow, some way, to forget all about it and go in and make the next play count. And even if that play doesn't (work), he forgets that one and continues to move on."

The Colts also are 14-4, and they're unbeaten at home. And Peyton Manning, probably the best regular-season quarterback of his era, should have extra motivation to show he can succeed in the playoffs, where he is 5-6.

"It's exciting because 5½ months of football games come down to 60 minutes of football," Brady said. "It should be just one of those classic games."

"Even if he's not having an up-to-par game in his eyes, he has the ability, somehow, some way, to forget all about it."

## • Defense

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Indianapolis has played confidently and taken care of defensive business throughout the playoffs, shutting down the Chiefs' Larry Johnson and the Ravens' Steve McNair and Jamal Lewis in playoff wins.

The inspired efforts not only paved the way to victory, they silenced critics who frequently call the Colts' undersized defense soft.

"You play defense with an attitude," Indianapolis defensive end Dwight Freeney said. "That's how you're supposed to play defense. Regardless of whether you're home or away, you have to have that every snap."

"I know we have that now." For reasons players can't articulate, the Colts didn't have it during the regular season.

Particularly abysmal against the run, the Colts surrendered an average of 173 rushing yards per game, making stars of pedestrian running backs.

Indianapolis also had trouble pressuring quarterbacks and was prone to surrendering big pass plays. The latter was partly the result of a rash of injuries in the secondary; the former attributed in part to ill health on the line.

Safety Bob Sanders, a Pro Bowler last season, missed all but two regular-season games with a sore knee but is back for the playoffs. Nose tackle Corey Simon missed the entire season with a non-football illness.

And defensive tackle Montae Reager, who played in only five games, is out for the year after suffering head and face injuries in an auto accident.

But the Colts don't blame all of their regular-season deficiencies on injuries. Failure to execute in a scheme designed to exploit their speed and athleticism also was a problem. It doesn't seem to be now.

Indianapolis allows a post-season-low 185 yards per game and has yielded only three successful third-down conversions in 22 attempts.

"Guys are just playing faster, knowing their assignments," cornerback Nick Harper said. "For the most part, guys are healthy. In the regular season, we didn't have all 11 starters out there, but we have all 11 in the postseason."

"Guys are being accountable for what they need to do on the field."

And they're energized by what's at stake.

"Playoffs, that's the difference," June said. "You know that if you lose, you clean out your locker and go home. We take it a game at a time."

"We expect to play well every week, and we expect to play even better this week."

Dungy is confident the Colts have begun a defensive trend and are poised to spoil the predictions.

"If we do the things that we should do and play fast, play with energy and tackle well, we're a good defense," he said. "The days that we do that and the plays that we do that, we're very good."

"Now, what we've got to do is put together 60 plays together like we've done the last two weeks ... that's what we're capable of."

## Patriots' Harrison getting healthy

The Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass.

New England Patriots safety Rodney Harrison was upgraded to doubtful Wednesday for Sunday's AFC Championship Game at Indianapolis.



HARRISON

He had been listed as out with a knee injury before each of the Patriots' other playoff games, a 37-16 win against the Jets and a 24-21 victory against the Chargers in San Diego. A doubtful designation means there's a 75 percent chance he won't play. He didn't practice Wednesday.

Harrison smiled as he walked through the locker room in street clothes without a noticeable limp before his teammates practiced. He sprained his right knee in the regular-season finale, his second game back since missing six games with a broken right shoulder blade.

On Tuesday night, Harrison said little about his chances of playing Sunday.

He had not been available for comment since being hurt.

Harrison missed the final 13 regular-season games and both playoff games last season after he tore three ligaments in his left knee.

The Patriots also listed three players as questionable, all with the flu: wide receiver Troy Brown, offensive tackle Ryan O'Callaghan

and defensive lineman Mike Wright. All missed part of Wednesday's practice.

### Cause to celebrate

If the Patriots win again Sunday, their celebration may be more calm than when they mimicked Shawne Merriman's sack dance on San Diego's field.

San Diego's LaDainian Tomlinson said New England's players had no class and suggested the behavior stemmed from coach Bill Belichick. The coach reluctantly addressed the issue Wednesday.

"I have all the respect in the world for LaDainian Tomlinson and the San Diego Chargers," he said. "They're an outstanding football team, and right now our focus is on the Indianapolis Colts."

## • Colts

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

a grizzled veteran to know daydreaming about the Super Bowl isn't a wise decision just yet.

"We don't want to look too far ahead," he said. "We want to get this game, and we're going to get this game so we can get to the Super Bowl. There's no way of overlooking this game."

A number of players talked about the importance of trying to keep this week as normal as possible. The adage "take it one game at a time" was prevalent Tuesday, but the finality of losing Sunday has the team focused, players say.

"It's a huge week of preparation," tight end Ben Utecht said. "We're going to take it very seriously like we have all season and just come into work and put ourselves in the best position to win."

Last week's loss by San Diego ensured the Colts would host this week's AFC title game. It also meant that, in addition to film study and learning the coaches' game plan, players are exposed to other distractions.

After Stephen Gostkowski kicked a field goal with less than two minutes remaining to give the Patriots the lead over the Chargers, Gary Brackett's phone started ringing nearly nonstop.

"I got a ton of calls for ticket requests and everything," the linebacker said. "But I think you

have to put it into perspective. We have to set that aside for this game and go out there and play hard, and I think we'll be fine."

Defensive lineman Raheem Brock doesn't even bother with his phone anymore.

Since Saturday's win against Baltimore, Brock has been relaxing as much as possible and staying off his feet. He's also staying off his cell phone.

"I let my voicemail fill up," said Brock, who is already getting inquiries for Super Bowl tickets. "It's just been crazy. I tell them, 'If we make the Super Bowl, tickets are already set.' So I let my voicemail fill up, and I don't even deal with it."

"I'm not going to check it until the end of the week."

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