

The NFL on REO: Dominance

The Insane Ramblings of Gowdy Cannon

On to 2017...

Yes, I'm the guy who wrote a 2500-hundred word counseling session on how Tom Brady is the most overrated quarterback of all-time. But don't let that keep you from reading what I'm about to write. You should appreciate it primarily because I wrote the Brady article.

While players can be overrated or underrated to team success I do not think there is any way to get around claiming team superiority in an objective way. For example, we could argue all day whether Brady, Aaron Rodgers or Matt Ryan was the best QB in the NFL last year, but we cannot argue that New England was the best team. That was objectively settled on the field.

With that philosophy as a backdrop, I think it wise to give the Patriots their due for what they have accomplished the last 16 NFL seasons. Even more impressively than the 49er run of the 80s and 90s (due to the rise of things like free agency), the Patriots of the 2000s have owned the NFL. They have ruined the NFL's desire for parity, which the league is absolutely built to achieve.

You know they have won five Super Bowls and have barely lost two others. But the consistency goes way beyond that. Consider this list of accomplishments since 2001:

- New England has been one of the final four teams, playing 11 times.
- New England has failed to at least tie for the AFC East only once, 15 years ago.
- New England has outright won the AFC East 14 of 16 times.
- New England has won 25 playoff games, or as many as the

Browns, Lions, Raiders, Texans, Bills, Jaguars, Redskins, Rams, Buccaneers, Chargers, Chiefs, Dolphins, Bengals, Titans, Cowboys and Bears have won...COMBINED.

- New England has won 11 or more games 13 times.
- New England has zero losing seasons.

And on and on it goes. This franchise doesn't just win the Super Bowl on average every three years but is always a contender. They are always either good or great or otherworldly. It has been a wonder to behold, even if most of the country hates them like I do.

Bill Belichick and for the most part Brady have been the constants. They have proven they can lose or get rid of anyone (Romeo Cornell, Randy Moss, Josh McDaniels, Jaime Collins, Vincent Wilfork, Rob Gronkowski) and not miss a beat as far as wins and losses. New England has been a tad fortunate that the AFC East has been terrible this century, with 22 different coaches and 40 starting QBs having had a turn for the other three teams. But the Patriots are so good versus everyone that I doubt it would matter which division they played in.

How have they done it? By being good at everything.

Since 2001, they have finished in the Top 10 in offensive points per game all but one season and in the Top 10 in defensive points per game all but three times. They have proven that the adage "defense wins championships" is often too simplistic, although the other extreme is also false. Only twice have they failed to finish in the top half of the league in defensive points per game and those two seasons (02 and 05) were two of the worst seasons in the run, featuring "only" 19 total wins between the two seasons, a playoff miss and only one playoff win total.

On a micro-level you can see it more clearly. While I will not rehash any of my Brady article since it is entirely

unnecessary, I think looking at their success highlights how much of a team game football truly is and how it takes 35-40 players, multiple coaches and the occasional good break to have a run as New England has had.

For example, beyond the Tuck Rule break (ruled correctly to be clear) in that game, Adam Vinatieri still had to make two clutch FGs to pull that game out. Same for Vinatieri vs. Tennessee, kicking a block of ice football 48 yards to win that game on the way to another Super Bowl. Malcom Butler had to read and react perfectly in Super Bowl XLIX to pull that win from the jaws of defeat. Julian Edelman had to make a near impossible catch last year to keep the tying drive alive vs Atlanta. New England's defense had to shut Atlanta out over the last 20 minutes and force them to move backwards on two drives that could have been FGs to give the offense a chance. And of course Brady made some all-pro throws the last three scoring drives for New England last year to give them a chance.

What is special about this team is how they find a way to win when someone or some unit is off. The defense got torched by Smoking Jake Delhomme in the fourth quarter in the 03 Super Bowl and the offense bailed them out with 18 points in the final period to win. The offense was mostly ineffective in their first SB win vs St. Louis and the defense led them to the victory, scoring one TD on a pick 6 and setting up the other. Scott Kacsmar for Football Outsiders has studied and broken down stats for the NFL for years to find things that correlate to wins and losses. He says that when NFL teams fail to hit 7.0 yards per pass on offense, they win less than 25% of their playoff games this century. Yet New England is 9-7 in such games. In playoff games the last decade the team with the higher QBR rating by their quarterback wins 71% of the time. The team with the most wins despite having the lower QBR by their quarterback? New England with 4.

New England once murdered Peyton Manning and the Colts record

breaking offense in the playoffs in 2005 with Patriot wide receiver Troy Brown playing defensive back. That's how good this franchise is at plugging in pieces and winning no matter what.

What they have done since 2001 is in my opinion, the most impressive thing I have seen in professional sports. Because the NFL just doesn't get dominated like this. New England almost never misses the playoffs. They almost never go one and done. They never get blown out. They just win. The five championships are just part of the story. And as you can see below, they are in position yet again this year for us to see more of the same.

So even though I loathe them, I give them their due. They are the most dominant longterm franchise in pro sports in my lifetime. They deserve that recognition.

Phill's Pre-Season Power Rankings

Do you want to know why our power rankings are better than most of the others you will find out on the internet? Because we won't make you scroll through page after page to find out who is next on the list. We list them all on the same page. You're welcome.

Additionally, I am only going to be ranking the Top Ten. I have no interest in keeping track of all 32 teams because after you get past numbers 12 or 13, it's all just a gigantic coin toss. I will post the power rankings periodically throughout the season – most likely quarterly. Use the comment section below to argue and tell me why I am wrong.

10. Kansas City

Honestly, I don't love KC this year, but I couldn't justify putting anyone else in this spot. This is a team that can only go as far as Alex Smith can take them and he just can't take them that far.

9. New York Giants

This is the year the Giants will make some noise in the league. They were 11-5 last year and while they might not win as many games (they probably will) they should be a tough out in the playoffs. And if Eli goes "Super Bowl Eli" mode, then we could be talking about three-time Super Bowl champ Eli Manning. Weird.

8. Tennessee

It's playoffs or bust for the Titans after an eight season drought. By the end of the season, the drought will be over and the Titans will be starting their new streak: Playoff wins.

7. Dallas

They will take a step back this season but still have enough talent to be competitive. Their offensive line will keep them in games.

6. Seattle

They are almost unbeatable at home and are good enough to win some road games. That alone gets them into the playoffs. Plus, they play in the same division as the 49ers and the Rams.

5. Green Bay

Aaron Rogers is the best QB I have watched in my life from a skills standpoint. He can throw the ball better than anyone in the league. He is not a tactician like Manning and Brady though – he free-lances, ad-libs, and generally plays the position in a most unorthodox manner. But on the right team, that is enough to win and win big. This Green Bay team looks

like it has the right parts to make a deep run.

4. Oakland

All the MVP talk last year for Carr was a little overblown but he did have a very solid season. He should only be better this season as long as his leg has healed well. Adding Lynch to the offense could be huge or it could be another aging running back that refuses to accept he has lost something.

3. Pittsburgh

They have one of the best QB, WR, RB trios in the league. Maybe the best. Is that enough for them to contend in 2017? I think so.

2. Atlanta

This is a team that should be the defending Super Bowl champs. That was a monumental collapse. I believe it will have lasting effects on the team this season. I have them at second for now because of how last season ended, not because I think they will remain the second best team in the league throughout the season.

1. New England

Is there any debate about this? They are the defending Super Bowl champions and they got better this offseason. This team will be scary good this season. Their aggressiveness in the offseason feels like a team that is doing everything they can to make one last push for a championship. This push will probably last two or three years and it is clear Belichick, Brady, and company intend to go out in a blaze of glory.

Final Thoughts

Thanks for reading. If you enjoy what we do with our NFL coverage, spread the word. Tell your friends, your neighbors, and your coworkers. We are doing our part to improve the

conversation and dialogue about the NFL. And stick around because we have some pretty fun things lined up for this season.