Patriots catching Cowboys shorthanded

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

FOXBOROUGH, Massachusetts — From afar it appears that was once circled on the calendar as one of the most intriguing, challenging games on the New England Patriots (3-0) schedule has been relegated to a presumed victory.

Coming out of the bye, New England heads to Dallas this Sunday to take on a Cowboys (2-2) squad that's been derailed by injuries to quarterback Tony Romo and playmaking receiver Dez Bryant.

two-game trip that, along with the following week's trip to Indianapolis, has gone from a potential mettle-testing gauntlet to being relegated to expected victories for coach Bill Belichick's team.

Not surprisingly, though, Belichick and his team is doing anything but looking at a Cowboys team lacking star power as pushover.

"They have (Rolando) Mc-Clain and (Greg) Hardy coming back," Belichick said, beginning his best Lou Holtz sive front is a problem, the

opposition, when asked about avoiding a letdown. 'They're a good football team — best offensive line in the league, they have a really good defensive front, a lot of good skill players, (Jason) Witten is as good as they come, (Joseph) Randle has done a great job for them, (Darren) McFadden, he's an outstanding player, (Gavin) Escobar, (Terrance) Williams, (Cole) Beasley, they've got a great kicker and a good punter, the defen-

It's actually the first of a impression of talking up the linebackers are good, plus ing to establish a certain now they have McClain in that group.

'(Morris) Claiborne was the fifth pick in the draft or whatever he was. The corners are good. The safeties are good. They play all those guys. Put (Byron) Jones in there at safety, corner, nickel. So, there are a lot of good football players on that team."

Belichick's top general on the ground, Tom Brady, took a similar approach.

"There's no letdown for us," Brady said. "We're trylevel of play, and we got off to a decent start this year. So we've got to keep it going. We've got to sustain good practices, good games, good weeks, and see if we can just keep building. This team could easily be 4-0.

'They're playing at home. They've got a lot of good players, very talented team. Last year they were one of the best teams in football. They could've beaten the Saints easily last week in overtime, so they're a very good football team. I know it's going to

Walsh

would let us

out on the

ice with the team. There

players were

really good

Walsh

son in 1992-93.

real

His

also remembers watching

the documentary "Out of the

Woods" about Maine's 42-1-2

NCAA championship sea-

"I learned a lot about that

team and got to see my father

in action on the ice and in the

locker room. It was pretty

Travis Walsh has had a

The 5-foot-11, 180-pounder

solid career at Michigan

awesome," said Walsh.

memo-

were

good

ries.

to us.

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around Alfond Arena with

his brother "doing whatever

we wanted. Sometimes Dad

recalls running

11

Shawn Walsh

be a big test for our team." That may be true. It may

But it's certainly not the

Brady vs. Romo. Bryant vs. Rob Gronkowski offensive showdown that many were expecting and hoping for.

Regardless of what Belichick says, Brady vs. Brandon Weeden just doesn't have the same ring.

Or pose the same challenge for a New England team looking to improve to 4-0 for the fourth time in the Belichick/Brady era (2004, 2007, 2013).

UMaine

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The 6-3 Mark Hamilton (1 & 6) supplied Maine with a physical presence but he had his ups and downs as a freshman. He should take a step up this season.

At least two of the four freshman defensemen will be in the lineup on Friday against Michigan State in Portland and it is a promising group. Three of the four have offensive tools and 6-6 Stephen Cochrane supplies size and toughness.

Rob Michel, the Central Canada Hockey League Defenseman of the Year, is poised with the puck and racked up 53 points in 57 games for the Ottawa Junior Senators. Sam Becker had 48 points in 55 games in the North American Hockey League and Keith Muehlbauer amassed 58 points in 75 career games at Eastview (Minnesota) High School.

Up front, the Black Bears have enough quality returnees to put together two consistent scoring lines and possibly a third.

Swavely (8 & 20) and junior Cam Brown (7 & 21) were tied for second on the team in scoring a year ago and junior Blaine Byron (12 & 15) was just one point behind them.



MONTY J. RAND PHOTO

UMaine goaltenders Sean Romeo and Matt Morris (left) are looking for more consistency this season as the Black Bears open the hockey season on Friday at the Ice Breaker Tournament in Portland.

Byron had an 11-point improvement from his freshman season, while Brown and Swavely had bumps of nine

and eight, respectively. Swavely is a prototypical power forward and an outstanding leader; Byron is a creative playmaker with nifty hands and good ice vision; and the 5-7 Brown is a constant threat with his quickness and tireless energy. Brown is always around

the puck.

Swavely and Brown need to become more proficient goal scorers.

Nolan Vesey became the third Maine freshman in 13 vears to score double-digit goals a year ago (10 goals, 13 assists) and the first since Gustav Nyquist and Brian Flynn did so in 2008-2009.

Senior Will Merchant (5 & 4) showed dramatic improvement and junior Brian Morgan (6 & 7) finished with 3 & 3 in his last nine games.

Junior Brady Campbell (1 & 3) could evolve into a pointproducer but needs to be more consistent.

Hard-nosed sophomores Cedric Lacroix (5 & 6) and Malcolm Hayes (4 & 2) supplied a useful physicality and should be even more effective.

The four freshmen forwards will all have an opportunity to make an impact.

Dane Gibson, 22, led the British Columbia Junior Hockey League in assists a year ago with 57 to go with 32 goals; 21-year-old Justin Rai averaged over a point per game in the BCJHL; 6-4 Danny Perez had 49 points in 42 games in the Eastern Hockey League and gives Maine some needed size up front; and gritty Brendan Robbins had 44 points in 50 games in the U.S. Premier Hockey League. Seniors Andrew Tegeler

and Billy Norman and sophomore Jack Musil are looking to crack the lineup.

Seven of the nine freshmen are age 20 or older and seven stand at least 6-2, which should help the Black Bears win more puck battles.

Maine plays its first 10 games on the road or at neutral sites but 14 of the ensuing 16 games will be at home.

"I consider it an advantage with a young team to spend a lot of time on the road early. It minimizes the distractions," said Gendron.

Yankees

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perception was it was done on smoke and mirrors.

The reality didn't sink in even if the Yankees tried to execute their game plan of driving up the pitch count of Astros ace Dallas Keuchel on Tuesday. The left-hander threw 87 pitches in six innings and was behind in the count at various instances to 10 of the first 11 hitters he faced.

has played in 104 games and has posted two goals and 30 assists. He had two goals and 12 assists in 29 games last season. The second-team All-Big Ten selection missed the last six games with a broken jaw.

The 22-year-old Walsh said he inherited a number of things from his father including his exceptional work ethic and positive attitude.

"I wasn't a great player growing up so I had to put a lot of work into it [to be successful]," he said. "And my dad always told my brother and me to stay positive and help other people. That was one of his big things."

Walsh said the emotion of the evening will end when the puck drops.

"It's a big game. It's the first game of the year," he said. "We have real high expectations. We want to make the NCAA tournament. We want to win the Big Ten ... We're going to treat every game like it's the most important game of the season."

Hermon

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Higgins made it 2-0 only 1:58 later from the penalty spot after her corner kick bounced around in the penalty area and produced a liams cross. hand ball.

Allain expanded the lead momentum 5:32 later when an corner.

off an Emma Allmon cross when she beat the onrushing Flynn to the ball and poked it under her before they collided.

Collins pulled one back with 10:12 left in the half as she converted a glancing header at the far post off a Wil-

But Hermon regained the

alert Bri Saulter spied the wide-open Buck on the right side of the penalty area and slid a perfect pass across to

"Bri has a great eye. I saw everyone on the left so I made a run [to the right]. Then I faked a shot and the goalie went for it," said Buck, who slotted a 12-yarder into the far

Williams, who won numerous 50-50 balls, scored 2:18 into the second half when Eleanor St. Peter's corner kick pinballed to her and she roofed it from seven yards out.

PI aggressively swarmed the ball in the second half and kept Hermon pinned in its own end. But the Wildcats couldn't transform their dominance into more goals.

It mattered little.

Because the New York offense wound up amassing just three hits and two walks, the Yankees are no longer focused on whether they overachieved. They are dealing with the reality of an early postseason elimina-

"It's really disappointing," manager Joe Girardi said. "It's hard. You know seasons end abruptly, and it's very difficult. This is a club that fought all year long, and there's a lot of character in that room and this hurts. We just didn't get

Soccer

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barely got her hand on it forcing the ball to hit the crossbar before she made the save.

At 8:23 Brooks nailed a shot outside the 18 that went over Henderson's arms to make it 3-0. Henderson finished with 14 saves, while the Dragons had 23 shots.

"It was a great game," Hamel said. "Our battle all year has been, can we finish and play a full 80 minutes. And today we got 63 in before we had a mental breakdown and let one of

their players get open and finish.

"We have to prepare ourselves for playoffs so we have to prepare ourselves for 80 minute games," he added.

The Witches held a 5-3 advantage in corner kicks and had 11 shots.





NFL owners discuss franchise relocation

BY LARRY FLEISHER THE SPORTS XCHANGE

NEW YORK — A year ago, a sizable media crowd flocked to the Conrad Hotel in downtown Manhattan to hear commissioner Roger Goodell speak about the rash of criminal behavior in the NFL and how the league intended to fix the problem.

This year, crime and punishment were not the main topics at the annual fall owners meetings, which concluded Wednesday at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, mere blocks from the league's Park Avenue headquarters.

The main topic of the meetings was the possibility of franchise relocation to Los Angeles, which has not had that's something that there's a made and are not expected to an NFL team since 1995, when recognition it has to get rethe Rams left for St. Louis and the Raiders departed for Oakland. Further meetings about relocation for the San Diego Chargers, Rams and Raiders will happen in January, if not later, after the topic was discussed extensively Wednesday without resolution.

"I think obviously there are two potential solutions in Los Angeles," Goodell said during a 21-minute press conference. "I think it's very positive that we have the two alternatives. We have three teams that are interested that have been struggling to get communities for not just sev"I think the ownership was

very thoughtful today. They expressed obviously a great deal of concern to the communities where these teams are playing now and wanting to continue to be there and be successful long term but also recognizing that we need to find long-term solutions here. I think there's also interest in being back in the entertainment capital of the world. We have to do that right, and there's a process.

Even with that topic being at the forefront of the meetstadiums built in their own ings and representatives from each team making presentaeral years but decades, and tions, no final decisions were

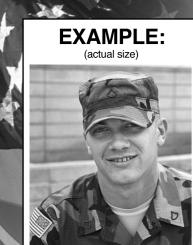
take place until January at the earliest and possibly until after the Super Bowl.

'Our timeline and planning for at least 12 months is to enable a January decision," NFL executive vice president Eric Grubman said. "What that means is to be able to put all the things in place that the league and the clubs can have an effect or an influence on and to bring those variables, bring that information, bring that analysis.'

Once relocation is put up for a vote and gets the 24 required votes, the league can discuss other components of the move such as temporary stadium arrangements and relocation fees

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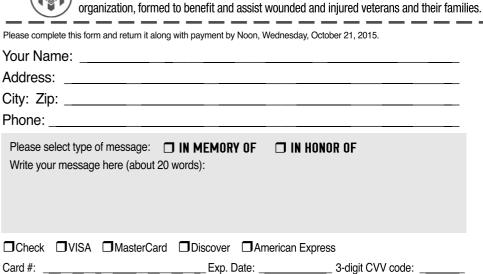
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