

Former Brady understudy eager for Sunday's game

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Once the understudy and backup to Tom Brady, Houston Texans quarterback Brian Hoyer will compete against the legendary Patriots New England Patriots quarterback Sunday night during a nationally televised game at NRG Stadium in Houston that carries major playoff implications for the Texans.

PATRIOTS NOTEBOOK

Following three years of learning behind Brady after going undrafted out of Michigan State and bouncing around with the Pittsburgh Steelers and Arizona Cardinals before two up-and-down years with his hometown Cleveland Browns, this is a significant career moment for Hoyer.

During his Patriots tenure, Hoyer absorbed knowledge from coach Bill Belichick, future Texans coach Bill O'Brien, then a Patriots offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, and Brady, the four-time Super Bowl champion and 10-time Pro Bowl quarterback.

Initially, Hoyer had doubts about going to the Patriots because of Brady's presence before being convinced by his agent, Joe Linta, to sign with them. It's become one of the best decisions of his life.

"My agent was like, 'I think you should go to New England,' and I said, 'You're crazy because they have Tom Brady,' and he's like, 'No, I think they really like you and it's a great opportunity to learn from Tom Brady, coach O'Brien, Bill Belichick.' I went in with that mindset, just soak it all up.

"It ended up being the most valuable years of my NFL career because I

learned from a lot of great people there how to do it the right way, how to be a pro and I've tried to apply that everywhere else I've gone."

Attention to detail and preparation are two of the hallmarks of the Brady success story. It's something he ingrained in Hoyer.

"You basically spend eight hours a day with the guy, anything from where we'd get in in the morning to watch film, to the practice field doing the same drills, working out in the weight room together," Hoyer said. "It's just kind of a natural thing. The great thing about Tom was he kind of pulled me along with him."

Hoyer is no longer in the background. Signed to a two-year, \$10.5 million contract this offseason to reunite with O'Brien, Hoyer is entrenched as the starter. This follows a rocky start to the season where O'Brien replaced him with chronically late and now unemployed Ryan Mallet before later naming Hoyer as the starter again.

Now, Hoyer has established career-highs with 61.2 percent accuracy, 18 touchdowns and a 94.4 passer rating. He passed for 2,202 yards with just five interceptions.

The intellectual aspect of Hoyer's game and overall growth as a quarterback have been evident throughout this season. He's frequently audibled. And he's distributed the football while making it a special point to take advantage of the skills of star wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins, who's caught 86 passes for 1,169 yards and 10 touchdowns.

Since his time in New England, Hoyer has endured a torn anterior cruciate ligament two seasons ago with



KEVIN HOFFMAN | USA TODAY

Houston Texans quarterback Brian Hoyer (left) drops to throw a pass as Buffalo Bills linebacker IK Enemkपालi rushes during the second half at Ralph Wilson Stadium on Sunday. The Bills beat the Texans 30-21.

the Browns and being replaced by the hard-partying Johnny Manziel last season before landing in Houston.

"He knows the game a lot better, he understands the pro game," O'Brien said. "Having to go through a lot in his career, being injured, being cut, he has a lot of resiliency, mental toughness, very bright guy, He's grown a lot since I had him in 2009."

The development of Hoyer doesn't surprise Belichick, who identified winning qualities in the 6-2, 215-pounder coming out of college. The intangibles are big for Hoyer.

"We saw a lot of what ev-

erybody's seeing from Brian: smart kid, has a lot of poise, toughness, very good deep-ball thrower, sees coverages well even though he's not physically imposing, but he has good vision and good awareness" Belichick said. "The big thing with Brian was he never got a chance to play, which was a good thing for the team, but kind of bad for him. He didn't get that opportunity until later, and he's obviously made the most of it."

Gronkowski returns to practice
New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski

returned to practice on Thursday for the first time since injuring his right knee on Nov. 29.

He wore a brace to protect the injured knee and was seen jogging during the part of practice open to reporters. His availability for Sunday's game against the Houston Texas hasn't yet been revealed.

Gronkowski sprained and bruised the knee in a loss to the Denver Broncos and missed last Sunday's loss to the Philadelphia Eagles.

Receiver Julian Edelman, who is recovering from a broken foot, didn't practice.

Meanwhile, Texans defensive end J.J. Watt broke his left hand in Wednesday's practice but plans to play in Sunday's game.

Watt missed practice on Thursday and was sporting a cast on his left hand. He told reporters he isn't feeling pain and will attempt to play in Sunday's game.

Watt was listed on Wednesday's injury report with groin and hand injuries. The groin injury bothered him in last Sunday's game against the Buffalo Bills.

The All-Pro has started 76 consecutive games since entering the NFL.

400th

Continued from Page B5

COACHING NOTES: Bangor's 59-42 win over Lewiston on Tuesday marked the 100th win of Carl Parker's varsity coaching career. Perhaps best known for his work in the state's AAU basketball community, Parker is in his

12th year as a varsity head coach, including previous stops at Bangor, Foxcroft Academy, MCI of Pittsfield and Nokomis of Newport. Parker is in the first year of his second stint at Bangor, where the 1-1 Rams face their first road of the season Friday at Cheverus of Portland. ... Parker's new JV coach at Bangor is former Rams' and University of Maine forward

Jon McAllian. ... McAllian returned to his alma mater after spending the last two seasons as head coach at Bangor Christian. ... Bangor Christian athletic administrator Kevin Reed, who preceded McAllian as the Patriots' head coach, has returned to the sidelines at BC this year. ... Kyle Joy is the new boys basketball coach at Sumner. He replaces veteran

coach Walter Crabtree, who stepped down after last season. ... Joy was a three-year varsity player and two-year starter for Sumner who graduated from the East Sullivan school in 2004. He coached the Peninsula School of Prospect Harbor to a middle-school league championship last winter and also has coached that school's baseball team for five years.

Madden recovering from heart surgery

BY FRANK COONEY
THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Pro Football Hall of Fame coach John Madden is "fine and feisty" and is recovering from open-heart surgery at the UCSF Medical Center on Nov. 30, family sources told The Sports Xchange on Thursday.

Madden moved to an inpatient Oakland rehabilitation facility Wednesday and will reside there the next couple of weeks, but is described as "already well along the road" to a full recovery.

Madden, who will be 80 in April, is a football icon who initially made a name as head coach of the fabled Oakland Raiders of the 1970s. He went on to mega stardom as an award winning broadcaster and the man behind the biggest franchise in video gaming, Madden Football.

He closely guarded release of information on the problem that first arose the day before Thanksgiving. He was at home when he first experienced breathing problems. He called a doctor and an ambulance was dispatched to take him to the nearby Pleasanton Valley Care center. After blood tests, and consultation with an "A Team" at UCSF, Madden was transported to the facility in San Francisco, where he underwent the surgery on Nov. 30.

Doctors soon learned about Madden what those who knew him already knew, that he is always in coach mode. As surgery began, the surgeon asked Madden, "Are you ready?" Madden, getting to the heart of the matter, as it were, replied, "What's important is are YOU ready?"

Madden's family, and agent Sandy Montag, tell The Sports Xchange that "he is doing great and will come out of this even better than before."

John and Virginia Madden (married Dec. 26, 1959) live in Pleasanton near their two sons, Joe and Mike, and five grandchildren that he mentions constantly on his weekday radio show on KCBS.

Madden first used his coaching instincts in 1960 at Allan Hancock Junior College in Santa Maria, Calif., then moved to San Diego State in 1963 where he was influenced by head coach Don Coryell. In 1967 Madden was hired as linebackers coach of the Raiders by Al Davis and in 1969 became head coach at the age of 32, beginning one of the greatest NFL coaching careers in history.

Madden took the Raiders to a conference championship game in seven of his ten years and made the playoffs eight of ten years. His Raiders were in the AFC Championship game five consecutive years (1973 through 1977) — a feat never accomplished by any team in either conference. The Raiders beat the Vikings to win the Super Bowl in 1977.

More impressive, this was during an era in which the AFC had some of the greatest teams in football history, including the Miami Dolphins, Pittsburgh Steelers and Kansas City Chiefs, teams whose coaches are already in the Hall of Fame.

Madden's winning percentage of .750 is better than all but one of the HOF Coaches (Guy Chamberlain had a .759 average in his six-year career from 1922-27). His overall record of .731 is behind only Chamberlain (.759) and the great Vince Lombardi (.740). Madden was the first coach to win 100 games in only ten years (103-32-7). There are four Hall of Fame coaches who coached ten years or fewer — Chamberlain (six years; 58-16-7), Vince Lombardi (96-34-6), Greasy Neale (63-43-5), and Bill Walsh (92-59-1).

Hall

Continued from Page B5

— Cummings, of Lewiston, has had a legendary golf career in Maine and New England. She won the Maine Women's Amateur Championship six times in four decades and finished as runner-up nine times. Cummings also has won 11 Senior Championships in the last two decades.

— Friedman, of Cape Elizabeth, enjoyed a nine-year professional ice hockey career, winning a Calder Cup while captaining the Hershey Bears in the AHL and playing with Edmonton and Nashville in the NHL. The former Boston University captain and three-time Final Four participant is head ice hockey coach and director of athletics at Kents Hill School.

— Hamblett, of Portland, won 28 state powerlifting championships, 19 national championships and five world championships while setting three American records and one world record. Hamblett, who graduated from Deering High School and Maine Maritime Academy, participated in national



BDN FILE

Amy Vachon, shown in 2011, was announced as an inductee to the 2016 Maine Sports Hall of Fame.

and world competitions for more than 20 years.

— Kelley, formerly of Waterville, also twice played in the NCAA finals for BU. He was the Terriers' most valuable player and an All-ECAC selection. Kelley had two stints coaching the Colby Mules, 1955-62 and 1976-77. He coached the Hartford Whalers to an AVCO Cup title in the World Hockey Association.

— Payne, of Brewer, was a tri-captain and an all-state running back for state champion Brewer High School. Letterman Maga-

zine called him one of the 22 best running backs in the nation and the 1970 Kick-Off Magazine listed him as the second best running back in the New England/Mid Atlantic states. Payne was chosen for several all-American football squads.

— Phillips, of Portland, who pitched in relief in 1970 for the Red Sox, also had a stellar career in minor league baseball. Phillips was the No. 1 hurler for Colby College, was an All-State player at Deering High School and starred on state and New England Little

League championship teams. He notched a number of no-hitters during his career.

— Roy, of Yarmouth, was an elite high school ice hockey player who became a quadriplegic when he crashed into the boards in his first game at Boston University. The author, speaker and fundraiser for spinal cord injury research and survivors is the lone Terrier to have his number retired. The Boston Bruins recently awarded him a one-day contract to recognize his work.

— Vachon, of Augusta, is an assistant coach at the University of Maine where, as a player, she set school and league assist records and guided the Black Bears to two America East championships and four NCAA Tournament appearances. At Cony, she was USA Today Maine Player of the Year, Gatorade Player of the Year and Miss Maine Basketball.

Tickets are \$55 each and \$500 for a reserved table for 10. They may be purchased at www.mshof.com or by sending a check to MSHOF, P.O. Box 222, Oakland 04963. The social hour starts at 11 a.m. and the luncheon begins at noon.

Finalist

Continued from Page B5

dates serving as FCS coordinators are: Kevin Bourgoin (2005-present as coach at UMaine), associate head coach/offensive coordinator; Jared Backus (1999-2001), associate head coach/defensive coordinator, Dartmouth; Kevin Cahill (2008-2011), pass game coordinator, Yale; Dennis Dottin-Carter (2008-2012), co-defensive coordinator, Delaware; Mickey Fein (2001-2002), offensive coordinator, Lafayette; Mike Kelleher (1996), defensive coordinator, Brown; and Steve Vashel (2009-2011), defensive coordinator, Yale.

Even though barely two weeks have passed since

Cosgrove relinquished control of the football program, Creech and the committee appear poised to have a coach on board in the next 10 days or so.

"There's some very practical reasons why we need to work as quickly as we can," reiterating the importance of UMaine's recruiting efforts in working toward the National Letter of Intent signing period in February.

An offer likely will have been made to one of the finalists by the end of next week.

"It will be timing and what that person's schedule looks like and those sorts of things as far as when an announcement will come," Creech said. "The goal was to have a coach on board before the holiday hits and we're on pace to get there."

Race

Continued from Page B5

ly, she said and the city is partnering with a number of organizations to help get the event off the ground.

Kieffer said the names of these organizations "will be revealed at a later date."

Caribou City Manager and race committee member Austin Bless believes the event will have a positive impact not only on Caribou, but on Aroostook County and northern Maine.

"Being able to have a Boston Marathon qualifier event is huge," said Bless. "It's going to attract racers not just from our area, but from around the state, Canada and elsewhere. My hat's off to

Lydia and this venture. I'm looking forward to seeing the great results that come from it."

Racers interested in signing up can do so by visiting runsignup.com and typing "Caribou Marathon" in the search field. Tickets for the marathon cost \$60, half marathon tickets are \$55, marathon relay tickets are \$25, half marathon relay tickets are \$20, and Caribou Kids Run tickets are \$25. Ticket prices are set to increase on Jan. 31.

Top male and female athletes will receive a \$500 cash prize and those who qualify for the Boston Marathon will receive a special medal. In addition, all participating racers will receive a goodie bag for participation.

The Boston Marathon is held each year in mid-April.

UMaine

Continued from Page B5

Through eight games, Bernstein is averaging 5.1 points, 2.1 rebounds, 2.9 assists and one steal in 18.9 minutes per outing. He has scored in double figures three straight games, averaging 11.3 ppg

during that stretch.

Bernstein is known to his family and friends simply as "Boz," a nickname he received as a child from a friend of his mother, Annie.

"It sounds weird when I hear, 'Ryan Bernstein checking into the game,'" he said.

"You might have to legally change it," Walsh quipped.