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Johnson likes what he sees

As if starting out 0-2 was bad enough. Bill Parcells had enough concerns to fill Foxboro Stadium. Now, at 3-2, Parcells is even more exasperated because his defense is struggling and is now starting to put pressure on the offense to score more points.

Linebacker and defensive signalcaller Ted Johnson thinks that a whole lot is being made of what amounts to three poor quarters in the three Patriots victories.

"I'm not too alarmed because we're doing things and forcing teams out of their game plan," Johnson said. "We're getting teams to do what we want them to and we're still not successful in that area of the game. You want teams to throw the ball and we've done that by shutting down the run."

True, the Patriots have been shutting the down the run, rated sixth overall. The flip side is that they have been victimized by so many Hail Mary passes that Divine Intervention has to play into this somewhere. As a result, they are rated 29th overall against the pass.

"That's what is so unsettling for us. For the most part we've done a lot of good things," Johnson said. "It's not like it's been a total disaster. It's really not. I think that we've got a really good solid defense. There are a couple of facets within that we need to address. We need to correct those things before the games don't start going in our favor and that's when we'll be really be in trouble."

From Parcells' standpoint, the defense will have to stand up and be counted -- soon.

"Defense is the key to any sport," Parcells said.

"I know we're in a very critical time here now. We're playing good teams and we're going to have to get to a better level defensively or we're not going to win games."

For Johnson a win is a win and it doesn't matter how you get it. Just as long as you get it.

"(The defensive players) have a lot of pride," he said. "We realize that as a unit. It's not going to be a problem. We've got a lot of guys who've bought into this thing and come to work with a good attitude."



Former Patriots cornerback Maurice Hurst is in the process of filing a lawsuit against team physician Bart Zarins. Hurst and his agent J. Douglas Sunseri of New Orleans are contending that Zarins knew of Hurst's nerve/spinal problems as far back as 1994 and failed to disclose the exact nature to Hurst -- and thus jeopardized his health.



By now it should be very apparent that as Drew Bledsoe goes, so go the Patriots' chances. After a subpar performance in 1995, it now appears that Bledsoe is back on track, and so is the team.

In 1995, Bledsoe struggled early and often, and so did the Patriots. In Bledsoe's first five games last year, the Patriots managed one victory. This year, Bledsoe, with some added weapons, has turned it back on in a big way and is looking like the Bledsoe of 1994.

"I'm more comfortable back there throwing the ball and not trying to over-think things," Bledsoe said. "I'm just going out and playing and good things are happening for us now."

With his confidence starting to grow, Bledsoe can only foresee good things in the future.

"(The receiving corps) have demonstrated that when I put the ball in their direction that they're going to come up with it," he said. "When you see guys doing that, you feel a little more free to let it fly and count on them to come up with the ball."



Prior to the 1995 season, the Patriots interviewed Redskins kick returner Brian Mitchell, but ultimately decided on signing David Meggett.

"Other than a small segment of the population -- one block in (Meggett's hometown of) Charleston, South Carolina where his mom lives -- everybody below the Mason-Dixon Line thinks that Brian Mitchell is better than he is anyway," Parcels said in attempt to poke fun at Meggett.

The funny thing is that Meggett agrees with his coach.

"You know why he is doing that," said Meggett about Parcels motivational efforts.

"I just laugh. Right now, compared to me, I would say that Brian Mitchell is better."



Cornerback Otis Smith, obtained by the Patriots this week, is glad to be a member of the Patriots.


"When I had the opportunity to come here, I jumped on it," Smith said.

Smith and Parcels have been acquaintances since 1990, when Smith was a member of the Philadelphia Eagles.

"I've always thought that (Parcels) was one of the best coaches around," Smith added.



Pires Prediction: Patriots 24, Redskins 7. After seeing his team implode on the field, Redskins coach Norv Turner puts a call into Sonny Jurgensen, John Riggins and Chip Lohmiller.

-Top-	-Home-	-Digest-	-Index-	-Staff-	
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