

# Patriots break 32-Year mile-high drought, 28-19

by Alan Greenberg  
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DENVER - Some of their fans may already have given up on this season. But it's obvious that the Patriots have not.

In this hostile place where no Patriots team had won in 32 years - that's 11 consecutive losses - the Patriots played what was easily their best game of the season. Heck, this was their best game since they spanked the hapless Cardinals in Arizona last Halloween.

The Drew Bledsoe offense that had been so inept in the red zone for four games was near-flawless against the Broncos Sunday. So was the Patriots defense, which shut down the Broncos running game and forced sore-shouldered (torn muscle) Brian Griese to throw a record 50 times. That isn't the type of record a team that relies on ball control and its running game wants to set.

The Patriots, after failing to make the big plays in an 0-4 start, made a bunch of them Sunday at Mile High Stadium and beat the Broncos 28-19, a score that only seems close because Denver scored a touchdown with 1:56

left.

Bledsoe, who threw four touchdown passes against the Broncos after throwing only three in the first four games, passed Steve Grogan to become the Patriots' all-time passing yardage leader (27,033).

"When I'm done with my career and I look back," Bledsoe said, "those things (individual records) will probably be important to me. But right now, all I want is to win ball games."

The Patriots won because it was the first time they have scored more than 19 points this season. Their 28 points were the most they have scored since their 31-28 victory over the Colts in week two of 1999.

And they won because, although the Broncos had first-down at or inside the Patriots 10 on two drives, the Patriots defense limited them to three points.

"The difference was better execution in the red zone on both sides of the ball," said Patriots coach Bill Belichick. "And guys like Terry Glenn really hung in there downfield making blocks to spring Troy (Brown) and Kevin (Faulk) after they caught the ball. These little things make a big difference. You never know when those 10-yard plays turn

into 60-yard plays. You've got to keep hustling and keeping working and good things happen."

Good things happened for the Patriots because they scored touchdowns on their first two possessions, the first time they'd done that in four years. Willie McGinest, who hadn't played since the first half of the Vikings game because of a pulled hamstring, sacked Griese on the Broncos' first possession and was alert enough to recover the fumble. The Patriots took over on the Broncos 29, and four plays later, instead of Adam Vinatieri trotting on for a field goal attempt, he was kicking an extra point.

After scoring only three touchdowns on 14 red zone possessions during their 0-4 start, the Patriots scored touchdowns all three times they were in the red zone Sunday.

And while McGinest gave them great field position the first time, the Patriots' other touchdown drives were long ones - 80, 77 and 81 yards.

Bledsoe spread it around, throwing two TDs to Brown (six catches, 124 yards), one to Glenn and one to rookie J. R. Redmond.

Bledsoe completed 18 of 27 passes for 271 yards. With his patchwork offensive line playing better each week,

he had more time to throw than he had all season. And Brown and Glenn, mindful of the big cushion the Broncos defensive backs were giving them, caught short passes and piled up serious yardage after the catch. Bledsoe didn't try to throw a home-run pass all day. He didn't have to. With room to maneuver, his receivers kept turning 3-yard receptions into 13-yard gains, 10-yarders into 20.

"They play some unique coverages that are very different from anyone else in the league," Bledsoe said.

"But every defense has holes," Brown said. "and we knew where they were."

The Patriots defense also understood the Broncos' offensive strength. The Broncos love to get the lead and then just pound the ball with Terrell Davis, especially inside their opponents' 20. But the Patriots knew that, and with middle linebacker Ted Johnson playing better each week, they limited one of the NFL's best rushing teams to 79 yards on 21 carries. Davis, recovering from an ankle sprain, had just 24 yards on nine carries and gave way to rookie Mike Anderson in the second half, who barely did better.

# Baseball award recommendations, leading with Thomas and Bonds

by Jon Heyman  
Newsday

With several worthy candidates in most every major category, award voters are going to work overtime this year. The toughest of all the tough calls is National League MVP, almost a four-way dead heat. All our choices:

**•AL MVP•**

1. Frank Thomas, White Sox, DH. Carlos Delgado has the best stats and Alex Rodriguez is the best player. But no one is more valuable than Thomas, Chicago's big force from the start. The DH thing doesn't bother us.
2. Alex Rodriguez, Mariners, SS. All-around skills will help in battle with three one-dimensionalists, Thomas, Delgado and Jason Giambi.
3. Jason Giambi, Athletics, 1B. Big September quickly moved him into the picture.

**•AL LVP• (Least Valuable Player):** Juan Gonzalez, Tigers RF. Much ado about very little. Carl Everett gets dishonorable mention for misbehaving all year and showing why the Mets had to trade him.

**•NL MVP•**

1. Barry Bonds, Giants LF. Giants people say Jeff Kent is MVP, but we'll take Bonds for his superior stats and huge finish. He'd have led the league in on-base percentage and slugging if Colorado's Todd Helton played in a real ballpark.
2. Mike Piazza, Mets C. Second straight woeful September cost him the top prize in our minds. It's almost unfair to ask someone to catch 130 games and carry a team, too.
3. Jim Edmonds, Cardinals CF. Brought everything Ken Griffey Jr. was supposed to: power, defense and wins to an NL Central team.

**•NL LVP• (Least Valuable):** Griffey. He engineers a trade back to his hometown, then has trouble cracking .270 (he finally did).

**•AL Cy Young•**

1. Pedro Martinez, Red Sox SP. Little suspense here. Lefthanded batters hit .153 against him, righthanded ones .186. With luck, he could have won 23.
2. David Wells, Blue Jays SP. That's two years out of two he's outdone Roger Clemens. Maybe that No. 33 ring should have been his.
3. Andy Pettitte, Yankees SP. Quiet 19-game winner. Barely beats Oakland's Tim Hudson.

**•AL Cy Old• (Worst Pitcher):** David Cone, Yankees. Denny Neagle made late run.

**•NL Cy Young•**

1. Randy Johnson, Diamondbacks SP. He's tops in ERA and strikeouts.
2. Robb Nen, Giants RP. The No. 1 reason the Giants are feared in this playoff derby. Has not blown a save since July 2.
3. Greg Maddux, Braves SP. Maybe we're becoming immune to the accomplishments of Maddux and Tom Glavine. We'll take Maddux over Glavine for putting together a late 391/3-inning scoreless streak.

**•NL Cy Old• (Worst Pitcher):** Jose Lima, Astros. A one-man argument for the juiced ball, with 48 dingers allowed.

**•AL Rookie of the Year•**

1. Kazuhiro Sasaki, Mariners RP. Some are going to say that such an accomplished player should not count as a rookie. But Hideo Nomo won before him. Thirty-five saves in 38 tries.
2. Benjie Molina, Angels C. Hitting .294, nailing 38 percent of base-stealers. What's not to like?
3. Mark Quinn, Royals OF. A very nice year gives K.C. outfield glut, with Johnny Damon, Carlos Beltran and Jermaine Dye.

**•NL Rookie of the Year•**

1. Rick Ankiel, Cardinals SP. He won't win because pitchers are overlooked.
2. Rafael Furcal, Braves SS-2B. Better at second than short.
3. Jay Payton, Mets OF. Good pop, excellent defense and a superb attitude, to boot.

**•AL Manager of the Year•**

1. Jerry Manuel, White Sox. Taking on Thomas over a spring-training drill worked; he has everyone's respect.
2. Mike Scioscia, Angels. Another big loss for the Dodgers.
3. Art Howe, Athletics. Just like AL West, a tight race between Howe and the Mariners' Lou Piniella. Worst Manager: Johnny Oates, Rangers. Texas stopped playing in May.

**•NL Manager of the Year•**

1. Dusty Baker, Giants. This will be his third.
2. Tony La Russa, Cardinals. Team kept going without Mark McGwire.
3. Bobby Valentine, Mets. Bobby Cox has better team.

**•NL Worst Manager•** Don Baylor, Cubs. Fouled up lineup card Opening Day, and it was downhill from there.

**•AL Executive of the Year•**

1. Ron Schueler, White Sox. Future looks even better than present.
2. Billy Beane, Athletics. If Dodgers job opens, he might take it.
3. Pat Gillick, Mariners. Moves to the top of the list if he can somehow keep Rodriguez (highly unlikely).

**•NL Executive of the Year•**

1. Brian Sabean, Giants. Now must lock up Baker.
2. Walt Jocketty, Cardinals. Even Will Clark trade worked.
3. John Schuerholz, Braves. Chipper Jones' \$90-million deal a good one.

Buck Showalter, likely to be out as Diamondbacks manager shortly after the season ends, has told folks he'd have a new job within a few weeks. If he does go, Jerry Colangelo will wind up giving Showalter seven years of pay for three years of managing.

A column in the Arizona Republic listed some negative incidents involving Showalter, and they reminded us of George Steinbrenner. According to the Republic, Showalter berated a clubhouse attendant for bringing ketchup in a plastic bottle instead of glass, got on a scoreboard operator for showing Craig Counsell's picture after an error and screamed at Hall of Fame broadcaster Joe Garagiola Sr. in response to a strategy question. The last one is a gamble, given that Garagiola's son, Joe Jr., is the Diamondbacks' general manager. Word is there's tension even between Showalter and a couple of his most trusted coaches.

New D-Back Curt Schilling has been the one vocal clubhouse supporter of Showalter. But another Diamondback said, "I wish Schilling could pitch every day. That way we wouldn't have to hear him."

There was a rumor that Boston might hire Showalter, but a Red Sox official shot that down, saying they've heard the stories about Showalter's controlling nature. If Manager Jimmy Williams and GM Dan Duquette can't make up, it's more likely that a lesser-known person such as Indians coach Grady Little or Red Sox coach Dave Jauss would be hired.

Perhaps Bob Watson will get a closer look as a general manager after the job he did as GM of the gold medal-winning USA squad. Despite restrictions, Watson picked a superb pitching staff, led by Cuba conqueror Ben Sheets (a Brewers prospect), plus Kurt Ainsworth (Giants), Jon Rauch (White Sox) and Ray Oswald (Astros).

"I've always been from the school where pitching's the name of the game. You build with pitching first, then catching, second base, shortstop and center field," Watson said. Watson would consider a big-league GM job but he's busy assisting son Keith with his financial-consulting business, Watson and Company, and starting a promotions company. Watson said, "I'll tell you one thing, I will not do it the way I did in New York, working 108 hours a week."

OLYMPICS

# Wrapping up the upset Olympics

by Amy Shipley  
The Washington Post  
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SYDNEY, Australia - The Sydney Games were an organizational marvel, an aesthetic wonder, a smashing success from transportation to ticket sales. Nobody disputes those facts. But what about the sports? One of the great ironies of the Olympics, the biggest sporting event in the world, is that the Games tend to be evaluated on everything but the athletic competition itself.

If the buses run on schedule, no bombs are dropped and no guns fired, the Games score well. But what about the games that are actually played?

In many ways, these were the Upset Olympics. The Games of the Underdog. The David-beats-Goliath storyline began back in 1993, when Sydney stunned Beijing - considered the favorite - in the International Olympic Committee's secret selection ballot for host city of the 2000 Games. The Aussies won in the fourth round of balloting.

Seven years later, Australian runner Cathy Freeman lit the cauldron, signifying the start of the Summer Games, and the upsets continued. On the first day of competition in Sydney, favored Aussie Michelle Jones lost the triathlon, outprinted in the home-stretch by a Swiss woman named Brigitte McMahon. Two weeks later, on the last night of track and field competition, the U.S. women's 4x100 relay team failed to win the gold for the first time in four Olympics.

"Expect the unexpected," Australian breaststroke silver medalist Leisel Jones had said presciently during the first week of competition.

A few favorites came through. Freeman and Michael Johnson won their

400 sprints. Marion Jones and Maurice Greene won their 100s. The U.S. men's and women's basketball teams defended their gold medals; Australian swimming star Ian Thorpe won his in the 400 freestyle; American Tom Dolan kept the gold in the 400 individual medley; Britain's legendary rower Steven Redgrave won an unprecedented fifth straight gold medal at 38.

The United States, as usual, won more medals than any other nation. Americans will bring home 97 medals - 39 gold. U.S. men won 54, the women won 41, and mixed teams won two. Marion Jones won a record total for a track female with three golds and two bronze. Russia finished second in total medals and gold, with 88 and 32.

After 15 world records fell in an amazing week of swimming, not a single world mark was broken in track and field. Freeman, Johnson, Jones and Greene won frequently but didn't rewrite record books.

It was the unknown gold medalists, the Davids in a Games of Goliaths, who defined these Olympics.

Their efforts were, time and again, rewarded by an Australian public that clearly identified strongly with over-achieving, underpromoted, surprise Olympic champions. Australians consider themselves an international underdog in some ways. "I think Australia is underestimated for what it can do," said Colin Diamond, a Sydney resident.

And Australians recognized great performances regardless of the source. Fans graciously saluted Netherlands swimmer Pieter van den Hoogenband, even after he upset the revered Thorpe. The strongest rooting, of course, came for athletes in yellow and green. About 10 minutes before the start of Freeman's highly

anticipated 400 final at Olympic Stadium, a woman madly pulled down the shutters on the coffee stand at which she worked in the concourse. Asked if the stand had closed for the night, she said, "It will re-open in 20 minutes. I'm going to watch Cathy."

Freeman held the nation's attention. Others had to grab it when they could. Wyoming-born wrestler Rulon Gardner might have claimed the Games' greatest upset, defeating the biggest, baddest wrestling champion in the world, Russian Alexander Karelin, who hadn't lost in 13 years and goes by the nickname King Kong. "After I won, I think I have had about 10 hours of sleep in four nights," Gardner said Sunday.

The United States beat Cuba in baseball, and U.S. manager Tommy Lasorda called the result bigger than winning the World Series. "I managed the Dodgers for 20 years and there were a lot of great moments," Lasorda bellowed. "But this is the greatest moment of my life."

Other underdogs earned a place in Olympic lore. Norway topped the U.S. women's soccer team, the defending Olympic gold medalists and world champs. American Misty Hyman shocked herself when she handed Australian swimmer Susie O'Neill her first defeat in six years in the 200 butterfly. Said Hyman: "I had to look at the scoreboard three times."

The Australian swim team gave the U.S. 4x100 relay team its first loss ever in the Olympic Games; unknown U.S. diver Laura Wilkinson limped to a gold in the 10-meter platform event; the American beach volleyball team of Dain Blanton and Eric Fonoimoana stunned Brazil in the final on sunny Bondi Beach.

Germany's Nils Schumann surpris-

ingly kept Denmark's Wilson Kipketer, the world record holder, from his first Olympic gold in the 800. Konstantinos Kenteris stole the 200 sprint title from a field that included Trinidad and Tobago's Ato Boldon, giving Greece its first Olympic medal in a men's running event in 104 years. Boldon did not bemoan the loss.

"The Olympics is about who survives," he said.

Van den Hoogenband not only defeated Thorpe, he broke Thorpe's world record in the 200 meters. U.S. swimmers Gary Hall Jr. and Anthony Ervin later stunned Van den Hoogenband, keeping him from the gold in the 50 freestyle. Little known Nick Hysong won the men's pole vault, bringing home the first U.S. gold medal in that event since 1960.

The U.S. men's soccer team made it to the medal round for the first time. The American rowing eight boat, three-time world champions, didn't get a medal of any color, finishing a crushing fifth. Kenyan Noah Ngeny ran down Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj in the 1,500 meters, and Guerrouj broke down in tears during the post-race interviews.

"It can be difficult," El Guerrouj said. "to take this pressure."

It wasn't difficult, though, for those who survived it to celebrate. Gardner, a 286-pound man, did a cartwheel and a somersault when his victory over Karelin became official. The men's 4x100 relay team celebrated with such arrogance they caused a small international furor.

Thorpe tried to put his gold medal in the 200 meters into words.

"When I finished the race, I didn't know what to do," he said. "I just felt this sheer energy inside of me when I touched the wall and realized I had become an Olympic champion."

