

FOUR FACES OF THE OFFENSE

A deep look at how Brady
and Co. score their points

by Doug Farrar

In 2007 the New England Patriots orchestrated the greatest single-season offensive performance in the history of the NFL. End of story, period, full stop.

There can be little debate when you go back and look at the numbers. They scored the most points of any team in NFL history—589, beating the old record held by the 1998 Minnesota Vikings by over 30 points. Their quarterback threw for the most touchdowns (50), and their primary receiver caught the most touchdown passes (23).

According to *Football Outsiders'* DVOA (Defense-adjusted Value Over Average) metric, which breaks down every play in a season and establishes an efficiency baseline adjusted for situation and opponent, the Pats ranked first in Total Offensive DVOA, Unadjusted DVOA, Weighted DVOA (weighted to give more credence to late-season results, to better indicate postseason momentum), Passing DVOA, Rushing DVOA, and Offensive DVOA on first down, second down, third down, first half, second half, red zone, and late and close situations. They made a mockery

of the NFL over the first three months of the season, and even when they plunked back down to mere reasonable historical dominance, they still looked just about unbeatable. 18–1 was a tough pill to swallow, but the consolation

Doug Farrar is a staff writer for Football Outsiders. He also contributes to ESPN.com and the Seattle Times, and runs two Scout.com NFL sites Falcon Insider and Northwest Football.



prize is the kind of statistical performance we may never see again.

Still, New England's 2008 season may have been even more impressive. Losing Tom Brady for the year halfway through the first quarter of the opening game, they went 11–5 with Matt Cassel, a backup quarterback who hadn't started a game since high school. Cassel's season began with a rough start, as his abysmal pocket presence was exposed by enemy defenses. But with modifications to the offensive game plan, Cassel became much more productive down the stretch. According to DVOA, the 2008 Pats were

actually more productive in their last eight games than the 2007 team was in its final eight (including the Super Bowl XLII loss)

Brady was back in charge in 2009 and a full-scale defensive rebuilding effort was on the horizon. Veteran acumen gave way to speed and agility, but there were rough spots as young defenders were obviously still finding their way at the professional level. The 2009 team made the playoffs despite one less win than the 2008 squad that didn't, but a wild card beating at the hands of the Baltimore Ravens ended yet another season without

the Super Bowl win that some Pats fans had started to consider a sort of birthright. Now, there are many asking the question: Are the franchise's best days—at least in the short term—in the past?

We can begin to answer that question by revisiting the 2007–09 seasons and analyzing some of the Pats' key strategies and innovations at a play level. Has the game passed the Patriots by? Do they rely on certain plays too much (the deep ball in 2007, the shotgun formation)? By looking at the recent past we can start to determine if the team has what it takes to return to the top in the near future.