



The Cleveland Browns hit the road on Sunday to take on the New England Patriots.

The Patriots are looking to clinch their fifth consecutive AFC East Division title, keep pressure on Denver for the No. 1 overall seed in the AFC for the playoffs, and push quarterback Tom Brady's record in games played in December to 43-6, the best winning percentage in the month for any quarterback since the merger in 1970.

As for the Browns, they have entered the portion of the season where they are evaluating the young players on the roster to find out "what they have" for 2014.

And since it is a new week, we get a new starting quarterback as Jason Campbell returns and will attempt to make it through four quarters of football without hurting himself.

### **The Opposition**

New England's record: 9-3

Offensive rank: 9th overall/10th passing/12th rushing

Defensive rank: 20th overall/10th passing/31st rushing

All-time Record: Browns lead, 12-9

Last meeting: Browns won, 34-14, in 2010

### [Injury report](#)

The line: Browns + 11

### **What to Watch For**

The Browns supposedly received a boost on Friday when head coach Rob Chudzinski announced that Campbell will start against the Patriots.

“The type of guy Jason is and the leadership that he brings certainly gives us a boost,” [Chudzinski said on Friday](#). “He’s been in the meetings, and then to go out on the practice field and be as sharp as he’s been is important.”

Campbell’s return means the Browns won’t have to turn to Alex Tanney or Caleb Haine (at least not until Campbell reinjures himself), which is probably more of a feeling of relief on the team’s part rather than a belief that Campbell can make a difference against the Patriots.

Campbell brings his 1-3 record as a starter (or 2-2 record if you believe in “moral victories”) back into an offensive huddle that still lacks any reliable offensive weapons outside of wide receiver Josh Gordon.

The one bright spot is, while we will still get to witness poor quarterback play on Sunday, at least it won't reach the comedic heights seen last week by Brandon Weeden, who has been ruled out for this week's game after suffering a concussion against the Jaguars.

The big question on offense will be how long it takes Gordon to set the franchise record for receiving yards in a season. The second-year wide receiver is just 41 yards away from breaking the record set by Braylon Edwards in 2007.

Standing in Gordon's way, other than his own quarterbacks, is Patriots defensive back Aqib Talib, who [Pro Football Focus currently ranks third](#) among corner backs with a 55.6 passer rating on balls thrown to receivers he is covering.

"I'm pretty sure (Talib) will make some plays," [Gordon said this week](#) . "But I'm definitely going to make more plays."

There may be opportunities for the Browns to get something going early, as the Patriots have been outscored 34-7 in the first quarter of their past three games and have trailed at halftime in four of their past five.

That streak could be in jeopardy on Sunday, though, as the Browns have turned the final minutes of the first half into a weekly comedy of errors.

Last week against Jacksonville was the sixth consecutive game that the Browns have allowed points in the final three minutes of the first half:

- Against Green Bay, it was a Mason Crosby field goal with three seconds left
- Against Kansas City, it was a Dexter McCluster 28-yard touchdown reception with 1:11 left
- Against Baltimore, it was a Marlon Brown 19-yard reception with nine seconds left
- Against Cincinnati, it was 10 points in the final 2:45
- Against Pittsburgh, it was 10 points in the final 2:30
- Against Jacksonville, it was 13 points in the final 2:47

Do that again this week against New England and the game could be over early. Remember how we said that the Patriots have trailed at halftime in four of their past five games? Well, in the second half of those games they've outscored the opposition 133-56.

It's going to fall on the defense once again to try and keep the ship afloat, a task made more difficult by the fact that Brady is 23-2 at home in the month of December.

"It's a challenge, definitely," [Browns safety Tashaun Gipson said](#) . "You've got a good quarterback who (defensive coordinator Ray) Horton believes is probably one of the best quarterbacks to ever play, and I agree with him, but when I take the field Sunday, when we take the field Sunday, there's not going to be that 'Wow' factor,

"When we touch the field, our mindset is he's just another nameless, faceless quarterback to us and we definitely want to make sure we capitalize on the mistakes he makes. At the end of the day, when you're dealing with an elite quarterback like that, you've definitely got to bring your 'A' game."

Not helping matters is that New England tight end Rob Gronkowski is back to being healthy – he has touchdown receptions in four consecutive games – and we all know how the Browns struggle to cover even mediocre tight ends.

They will also have to worry about wide receiver Julian Edelman, who is coming off consecutive 100-yard receiving days.

The Browns will be without starting defensive lineman Desmond Bryant and nickel back Chris Owens, who are both done for the season with injuries. In their place, rookies Armonty Bryant and Leon McFadden could receive more playing time, which will be good in the long run as every bit of game action they see can only help in the long run.

## The Prediction

The Browns have lost three straight and six of their past seven games as the hope of early October turned into the reality of how far this team still has to go.

“That’s why a lot of guys are disappointed,” [linebacker D’Qwell Jackson said](#) . “We feel like we’re right there. We’re right there and we’re just not finishing those drives, or the defense needs to get a stop. We’re not finishing games. This is the most talented football team I’ve been on since the ’07 team, so that’s the frustrating part about it. We can’t finish the game.”

The Browns have not won on the road against the Patriots since 1992, going 0-5 in their last five trips, and it is really difficult to see the Browns being able to score enough points against the Patriots to keep the game close.

We’ll take the Patriots and the points as the Browns move one game closer to the end of another disappointing season.

*(Photo courtesy of The Plain Dealer)*