

Odds in their favor

By JOHN TOMASE

PATRIOTS NOTEBOOK

FOXBORO — It's not your imagination. The Patriots really are one of the biggest Super Bowl favorites in history.

According to an oddsmaker with Bodog Sports, who asked not to be identified per company policy, he couldn't remember a more overwhelming preseason favorite than the Patriots at 8-5.

"Checking all of my past information and experience, I would have to say yes," he said. "Usually a big favorite opens at 6-1. New England opened at 10-1, but we had a huge change because of the new faces on the team (**Randy Moss**, **Donte' Stallworth**, **Wes Welker**, **Adalius Thomas**, etc.). The odds went down so fast to 9-5 or 8-5. Right now, they're at 2-1 and will probably go to 5-2 or 3-1.

"Those are more realistic numbers, because there's also two other high favorite teams in the same conference, Indianapolis and San Diego, and people are starting to bet more on them."

The oddsmaker explained that, in bookmaking numbers, the Patriots have a 30-35 percent chance

of winning the Super Bowl.

"Usually that number isn't higher than 15 percent," he said.

As a means of comparison, the 2004 Patriots opened at 7-1 to win the Super Bowl, while the 2003 champs opened at 12-1.

The last team to post such low odds throughout the preseason was the 1994 Cowboys, who opened at 7-2. Teams typically open low and get higher. The Pats have done the opposite.

Getting his kicks

A year ago, **Stephen Gostkowski** was enjoying his first days as the Patriots' placekicker following the release of veteran **Martin Gramatica**.

He's had the job all to himself this preseason, and although he missed a short kick against the Titans last week, coach **Bill Belichick** is happy with his progress.

"I think the kicker position is a little bit different than the other ones," Belichick said. "In this particular case, given the circumstances and everything we were dealing with, we were comfortable with that situation."

"I think Stephen has had a good camp. He works hard. He's a very

mature and dependable guy. Really, I don't have any problems with what he's done in training camp. I think, like everybody else, he has a ways to go with his game, like all of the rest of us do. I think he's worked hard. I think he's improved and I think that he's kicked well through the overall course of camp."

Odds and ends

For the third straight week, Moss is not expected to play tonight against Carolina. He's nursing a hamstring injury and has not practiced since Aug. 1. . . .

The Patriots have 81 players on the roster and must trim that to 75 by Tuesday. From there, they have to be at 53 on Sept. 1, with eight-man practice squads established one day later. . . .

The third preseason game is considered a showcase for the starters, and the Patriots have played like it recently, winning four of their last five. They beat Washington last year and Green Bay in 2005 by a combined score of 68-3.

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