

Can Less be More?

By Jesse Almeida 9/7/23

After a very disappointing season for most Patriots fans, people were starting to doubt the future of the Patriots franchise. Even though it felt like Bill needed to do something big, sometimes it is the smallest moves that can make a difference. The Patriots are still far away from competing in the Super Bowl. Brady's departure in 2020 made it clear the franchise needed a reset in their future. The Patriots would miss the playoffs in 2020 finishing 7-9. The next season the Patriots finished 10-7 making a playoff spot but getting blown out in the wild card round by Buffalo. Finally, last season New England took a step back and missed the playoffs at 8-9. The step back last year was alarming to Patriots fans because Mac Jones took a regression also. Bill needed to make some moves in order to get New England back in the playoffs and compete in the playoffs again.

One thing the Patriots needed to do was address the offensive coordinator situation. Last year Bill hired Matt Patricia to run the offense and it blew up in his face. The Patriots were the worst team in the red zone last year at 42 percent scoring percentage and the play calling was the main reason for this. In 2021 with Josh McDaniels, the Patriots were at 63 percent which was 7th in the NFL. The play calling from Patricia made Patriots fans and Mac Jones outraged. Matt Patricia lacked the knowledge to run an offense. It was clear that day that he was not the right man for the job. All of this definitely played a factor in Mac Jones' regression last year. Bill knew this also because his first move of the offseason was to bring back Bill O'Brien to become the team's newest offensive coordinator. O'Brien is an offensive minded coach who has experience with the Patriots playbook and knows how Belichick likes his offense to be used. Mac and Bill O'Brien also have that Alabama connection as O'Brien spent 2 seasons in Alabama as Nick Saban's offensive coordinator. Adding Bill O'Brien alone should help the Patriots offense and Mac Jones get back on the right track.

Next up was free agency. The Patriots needed to free up some money to help with filling out the best team for this upcoming season. Bill decides to ship off Jonnu Smith to Atlanta after 2 seasons for a 7th round pick. It is unfortunate that Smith did not fit in New England, but it was clear that the Pats needed to move on from the 28 year old tight end as he played a similar role as Hunter Henry. One position that the Patriots really needed was a wide out. After losing Jakobi Meyers to Las Vegas, Bill needed to upgrade the position. Even though there was no real number 1 wide receiver option out there, Bill went out and signed the best WR in the market. That would

be JuJu Smith-Schuster. Even though JuJu has dealt with injury, and had a setback season last season, JuJu has shown in the past that he can be a solid 2nd maybe 1st option wide out on a team. JuJu in 2020 had 831 yards, had 97 receptions on 128 targets, and had 9 touchdowns. In 2018, Smith-Schuster was a pro bowler where he had 1,426 yards, had 111 receptions on 166 targets, and had 7 touchdowns. Bill signed JuJu to a 3 year deal worth 25,500,000 dollars. JuJu will have the chance to bounce back this season and show that he has not lost a step in the league. After trading away Smith, there was a hole at tight end. Bill made a surprising move and signed Mike Gesicki to a 1 year deal worth 4,500,000 dollars. Gesicki is more known as a wide out tight end where he is more of a receiver than a blocker. His best season came in 2020 where he had 703 yards, caught 53 out of 85 passes, and had 6 touchdowns. Gesicki will now be able to expand the Patriots offense as they now have 2 different style tight ends on the roster. The Patriots also added some offensive tackle depth in Calvin Anderson, and Riley Reiff. Bill kept most of his players but lost Isaiah Wynn who was a liability on the offensive line, Nelson Agholor who did not really play, Damien Harris to Buffalo, Jakobi Meyers as mentioned before, and Devin McCourty called it a career.

In the NFL Draft, the Patriots addressed mostly their defense by drafting Christian Gonzalez a cornerback from Oregon in the 1st round, drafted defensive end Keion White from Georgia Tech in the 2nd round, and in the 3rd round was safety Marte Mapu from Sacramento State. In the later rounds Bill would draft their newest kicker Chad Ryland from Maryland, and hit on a couple wide receivers in Kayshon Boutte from Louisiana State, Demario Douglas from Liberty, as well as a couple offensive linemen as well.

As the Preseason began, even at that point Bill was not done making moves. Bill would add more offensive tackle help by trading for Tyrone Wheatley Jr from Cleveland. Bill was not only looking at the trade market. He was still looking at free agency as DeAndre Hopkins, Dalvin Cook, Ezekiel Elliott, and Kareem Hunt were let go by their teams. The Patriots were in on Hopkins because they were still lacking a solid number 1 wide out. They unfortunately missed out on the Hopkins sweepstakes and lost him to the Titans. Next on their list was Ezekiel Elliott because after losing Damian Harris, the Patriots were lacking running back depth behind Rhamondre Stevenson. The Patriots' meetings with Elliott went well and won the Zeke sweepstakes. Even though Elliott had a down year last year, Zeke has always been known as one of the better running backs in the game. He is a 3x Pro Bowl and an All-Pro player. Even in a

down year last year, Elliott had 876 yards on 12 touchdowns. Zeke also has the ability to be a receiving back also which can help compliment Stevensons game and allows pressure off of Stevenson as well.

The Patriots did what they should have done before the first week. They added more talent to the roster, and they got an actual offensive coordinator. Now what are the expectations for this team? The AFC East looks like it is going to be one of the toughest divisions in the league. The Jets now have Aaron Rodgers, Miami was a force until Tua got hurt last year, and the Bills are going to still be one of the better teams in the league. The expectation should be the Patriots being over .500 and possibly in the playoffs. If the Patriots make it to the playoffs, they need to win one round or at the very least be competitive in the wild card round. Last year the Pats finished 8-9, this year with the roster they have and with no injuries, this team should be 10-7 in the regular season.