

# **Patriot Reign Study Guide**

## **Patriot Reign by Michael Holley**

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# Plot Summary

Bill Belichick is the head coach of the New England Patriots, a National Football League team. He was born in Tennessee but has made the northeast his home. Belichick graduated from Andover Wesleyan in Massachusetts and got his first football job working for the Baltimore Colts in 1975 for \$25 a week. There he learned the ropes behind running an NFL football team, and gained a huge amount of experience over the next several years working varying positions for teams such as the Detroit Lions, New York Giants, and Cleveland Browns.

He met Bill Parcells while with the Giants as Defensive Assistant and later Defensive Coordinator. Although they worked closely together for a time, they later had somewhat of a falling out. Belichick found that his close ties with Parcells actually hurt his first chance at becoming head coach of the Patriots in 1997, when Parcells left after a rift with the owner Robert Kraft.

Belichick finally became head coach of the Patriots in early 2000 and had his work cut out for him to get the team in good shape. His new quarterback, Tom Brady, had great potential. However, Belichick also had a seasoned and popular veteran in Drew Bledsoe. When Bledsoe was injured during a game, Belichick put Brady in as head quarterback and Brady stepped up to the job. When Bledsoe came back off the injured list, Belichick made the fairly unpopular decision of keeping Brady in the top spot. This alienated Bledsoe, who left at the end of the season to join the Buffalo Bills.

One of the ways Belichick prepared his team for Super Bowl XXXVI against the St. Louis Rams was by working very closely with his staff to analyze and exploit any Ram weaknesses in defense and offense. He decided to target the Rams' running back, which was a very unconventional strategy. Going into the game, the Patriots were definitely considered underdogs to the popular Rams.

Belichick's strategy to stay in the game, keep it close and wait for opportunities paid off during the actual game. The Patriots made the Rams fight hard for any gains and it took an early toll on the Rams. The Patriots led in the third quarter 17-3. The Rams made a comeback in the fourth quarter, quickly tying the game. However, a field goal in the last few moments by Patriot Adam Vinatieri put them ahead and New England won the game.

The Patriots wavered in the following season; losing many early games and frustrating Coach Belichick. His staff and players were put under pressure to fix what ailed the team. Later in the season, the Patriots performed better, but it came too late to earn a place in the playoffs.

The postseason aftermath of the disappointing season is examined in the book as several players are dropped from the team. New scouting is performed and the Patriots pick up several promising players in the draft. The next season begins; and after another slow start, the Patriots begin to build momentum. There is a morale issue when



Belichick cuts a popular player and the rest of the team examines job security. His unemotional, logic-based management style gets some unpopular media scrutiny, but Belichick is pushing the players hard to give their best. The team is becoming stronger and the players are playing smarter and better.

Belichick also faces his old boss, Bill Parcells, who is now the head coach of the Dallas Cowboys. The rivalry between the previous assistant coach (Belichick) and head coach (Parcells) is revisited. The Patriots win the game and the old opponents make up. After several more close wins, the Patriots are again going to the Super Bowl.

The Patriots approach Super Bowl XXXVIII against the underdog Carolina Panthers with a twelve game winning streak. The Panthers are considered a clever team; and conventional wisdom predicts a low scoring game. This appears to be the case going into halftime; with the score putting the Patriots ahead 14-10. The third quarter is scoreless, but the Panthers come back in the fourth and the lead changes several times before Vinatieri kicks a field goal with nine seconds remaining to win.

# Introduction

## Introduction Summary

Michael Holley proposed writing a book about the Patriots to head coach Bill Belichick in 2002 and was fairly surprised when Belichick gave him the go-ahead. Having Belichick's support gave Holley the opportunity to follow the New England Patriots and record intimate details about how the team actually worked on a day-to-day basis. He was allowed unprecedented access to closed-door meetings, where he tried to blend in as well as possible.

# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

As the head coach of the New England Patriots, Bill Belichick seems a larger than life character. However, he also has the ability to step back as the great strategist he is and become somehow "average" in non-football situations. Away from work, he is a different person than the hard coach portrayed on TV; and he has a surprising sense of humor. But he also expects excellence in life; from himself, from his team, and from his family.

Belichick takes press conferences seriously by preparing at least 15-20 minutes ahead of time. He has learned from experience that what he says and how he says it can impact the game. He walks into a press conference having predicted media topics and how he will respond to questions. This is a vast change; after many lessons learned over previous years.

Belichick was born in Tennessee and raised in Maryland, but he likes the northeast. He has worked in Baltimore, Detroit, Denver, New York, and Foxboro. He attributes losing his first head coach interview in 1989 to not realizing the value of promoting the team at the time. He says that being the head coach is a 24-hour job. You must obsess over even minute details and be totally prepared for all situations. The head coach is a football CEO, and Belichick believes he underestimated this fact when in Cleveland. He realized that loose players and media control was a public relations problem. Belichick clamped down, which created friction; but more importantly, he didn't follow up with wins. As a result, Belichick realized he was incorrect in thinking he could "just coach" without looking at public relations.

In 1971 Bill Belichick was a 19-year-old center at Andover Wesleyan in Massachusetts. He found the curriculum very hard academically; but while he struggled with some difficult subjects, he had the presence of mind to work out problems with teachers. When he graduated, Belichick took a "dream job" with the Baltimore Colts for \$25 a week. It was a chance to talk and live football every day from 7am to midnight. He worked very closely with Coach Ted Marchibroda and lived for free at a Howard Johnson's hotel as a job perk. Meeting for breakfast with the coach every morning, he had the opportunity to talk football. With the Colts, Belichick was able to work scouting and special teams. He also acted as driver for the team and learned the ropes of film analysis; a skill that would stick with him. His father Steve had been the assistant coach at the U.S. Naval Academy, and was also a believer in breaking down plays using film. Belichick was given a raise, but when the season ended the general manager said the team couldn't afford to pay him during the off season.

He then took a job working for the Detroit Lions for two seasons, which allowed him to work with some of the top offensive coordinators of that time. Belichick called it an "all star staff." He married Debby Clarke in 1978 and moved to Denver. In 1979, Belichick



was brought back to the east coast to work for the New York Giants as their special teams coach; which began his later-strained relationship with Bill Parcells.

At just 26 years old, Belichick already had a huge amount of real life football experience. Those four years taught him valuable lessons: how to take control of a meeting and how to get differing opinions. He followed Parcells to the New York Jets and worked with Romeo Crennel, who would later become a member of Belichick's staff. Bill said it was difficult back then to maintain the authority relationship with the players because he was younger than many of them. He learned how to assert control when necessary.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Michael Holley sets up the first chapter of *Patriot Reign* by appropriately summarizing the life of Bill Belichick. Holley begins with Belichick in his current role as the head coach of the highly successful New England Patriots. He then flashes back to Belichick's college days and his first football experiences.

The author establishes the theme that Bill Belichick did not inherit this position by any stretch of the imagination; showing instead that he graduated from the school of "hard knocks." To that end, Holley elaborates on Belichick's lifelong habits gained from early football "menial" jobs and some of the mistakes he made along the way. The author describes how Belichick learned to see the big picture of coaching by missing the point (and losing a job) at least once in his career. The theme of Belichick as a football person who gravitates towards similar thinking people is established by explaining Bill's relationship with his first coach, Ted Marchibroda.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

The relationship between Bill Belichick and Robert Kraft is very close. They seem to understand each other intimately. There are no suspicions of political motives when questions are asked, and they are both obsessive football fans. However, Kraft did not have this type of open relationship with his previous head coaches; specifically Bill Parcells.

The legendary Bill Parcells left the New England Patriots abruptly in 1997 after tensions with Kraft, who was a new owner. Public perception was that Kraft had hounded him out. At the time, Belichick had been with the team as assistant head coach for only a year. Kraft had worked with both men on a daily basis, but the relationship was much more strained between Kraft and Parcells.

Kraft had a strong football background. He played intramurals at Columbia University, then going to work at his father-in-law's paper company, Rand-Whitney. Kraft founded International Forest Products and started investing in the stock market in the 1970's. He amassed enough capital to acquire Rand-Whitney by the early 1980's, and later bought the Patriots in 1994 for \$200 million.

Bill Parcells was a very successful football coach with a championship ring to his name. His daily press conferences were media events in themselves. Kraft had "inherited" him when he bought the team, but Kraft also felt that Parcells owed him answers when he asked. Kraft didn't believe in giving the media savvy Parcells as much control as he wanted. The two men simply weren't compatible from a business standpoint. Some of Parcells' press conferences were more notorious than the actual football games. Tensions between Kraft and Parcells escalated, and a public feud started over the AFC championship game. Kraft received news of Parcells leaving just before Super Bowl XXXI, and the Patriots ended up losing to the Green Bay Packers by a score of 21-35.

Kraft immediately thought of Belichick to replace Parcells but didn't hire him because he thought Belichick's history with Parcells would cause problems. Kraft hired Pete Carroll for the head coach position while Belichick left with Parcells to work for the Jets as Assistant Head Coach, a decision Belichick later regretted. Carroll was a good defensive coach, but he was not right for the Patriots. He taught well, but didn't manage. Carroll had three seasons with the Patriots; each with a worse record than the one before, even though they made the playoffs during the second season. Kraft decided not to make the same mistake twice. When Carroll was finally let go in 2000, Kraft immediately started the process to hire Belichick.





## Chapter 2 Analysis

The second chapter is mainly spent introducing and elaborating on the relationship between Belichick and Robert Kraft, owner of the Patriots. Robert Kraft's upbringing is examined after showing a quick look at how he interacts freely with Belichick, his assistant at the time, and compares this with his relationship to Parcels. The personality of Bill Parcels is also discussed; with some time given to how Belichick's fortunes were closely tied to his. Parcels is portrayed as Belichick's nemesis, in that Belichick has to be free of him and later face him as head coach of his own team.

Parcels is portrayed as someone who fouls Belichick's chance of getting Parcels' old position because of his closeness to Belichick throughout the past decade. The author has the benefit of hindsight in noting that Kraft should have hired Belichick the first time. At this point in the book, Holley is already setting the stage for Belichick going up against his former boss Parcels later in the story.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Bill Belichick was hired by the New England Patriots as head coach on February 14, 2000. The team was his responsibility now, and the Patriots were in bad shape as a group. There was no leadership and morale was low; the team had been in decline for the past several years. The majority of players were split between green recruits who were years from their peak and experienced players who were past their prime. Out of six additional draft picks the Patriots had received as compensation for losing Parcels, only one had turned out to be a performer who was soon badly injured. The team was also ten million dollars over their salary cap. Bad oversight resulted in overpaying average players, but not compensating talented ones; which resulted in good players leaving.

Belichick started work immediately in finding new talent, specifically in finding players with leadership potential. His quarterback coach, Dick Rehbein, had selected two potential quarterbacks for review. Both Belichick and Rehbein preferred University of Michigan's Tom Brady. As sixth round draft pick, Tom Brady proved to be formidable competition for veteran quarterback Drew Bledsoe. Tom took his work seriously and pushed other players as hard as himself. He quickly outgrew his job as backup quarterback and became a serious rival to the popular Bledsoe, who had been with the Patriots since 1993. Belichick had made tough quarterback decisions before. When Bledsoe was seriously injured in the second game of the season, Belichick put Brady in as starting quarterback. Brady showed his abilities and was kept in the head position even after Bledsoe came back to full health status. Bledsoe had been with the Pats nine years and was their best-paid star, but Belichick was a strong believer in performance-based rewards. To the head coach, Bledsoe wasn't as important to the team's success as the media thought. When Rehbein died unexpectedly in the summer of 2001, Belichick became the acting quarterback coach; giving him greater control of the situation). There was great tension in the meetings between Belichick, Brady and Bledsoe, and the veteran quarterback's attitude became worse. Although Bledsoe did well in the AFC championship game when Brady was injured, he made it known he was not happy with the new situation. Bledsoe was finally traded to the Buffalo Bills at the end of the season.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Holley takes up the third chapter as Belichick is finally hired as head coach of the Patriots with many obstacles to overcome. He introduces Belichick's unemotional method of problem solving used to fix the team; both in new hires and in developing attitude and character.

The author highlights Belichick's 'intellect over emotion' style of decision making when he chooses to put his emphasis on unproven Tom Brady over the popular veteran quarterback Drew Bledsoe. The drama between the two quarterbacks plays out with Holley having insight of some of the behind the scene happenings. He compares the real coach/quarterback interactions with how the situation is playing out in the media.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 introduces Patriot field goal kicker Adam Vinatieri in the strange, hyper-patriotic environment immediately after the September 11 attacks. Adam was solid kicker and a creature of habit who was focusing in on the upcoming Super Bowl game in Louisiana. As usual, the field goal kicker was not considered a deciding factor in the game; especially a Super Bowl game. However, Belichick had made some ominous comments about his kicker being his most consistent player all season. Vinatieri had made a 45-yard field goal in a snowstorm to tie a recent game and then kicked another 23-yarder to win. Therefore, the concept of a field goal kicker being a deciding factor was not unprecedented; just unusual.

The Patriots were definite underdogs against the St. Louis Rams going into Super Bowl XXXVI. The Rams were considered "the greatest show on turf." They were coming off three strong seasons, including one Super Bowl win and one playoff run. The Rams were 14-point favorites; having defeated the Patriots earlier in the regular season. This win had also been conducted at seasonally cold Foxboro, while the Super Bowl game was to be played in optimum conditions on artificial turf. Mike Martz, the Rams' head coach, was a Civil War scholar who believed in deception on the field to keep opponents guessing. Media opinion was heavily in favor of the Rams.

Belichick worked closely with his defensive coordinator Romeo Crennel and his friend Ernie Adams to analyze the opponents' defensive strategies. He wanted to be ready to take advantage of Rams' turnovers, as they had 44 during the regular season. He also had learned from analyzing the earlier game with the Rams that blitzing was not effective against the Rams' quarterback, Kurt Warner. He planned to shake up Warner by not blitzing and emphasizing more on coverage. Belichick summarized the Rams as having only five basic passing concepts; all revolving around the quarterback going to the running back, Marshall Faulk. His team adapted the rather non-traditional strategy of focusing on a running back versus the quarterback.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

In chapter 4, Holley picks up on Belichick's innate ability to analyze and pick apart his opponent's strengths for the purpose of exploiting them. He also noted again how Belichick was very aware of the pressure of a Super Bowl game and wanted his players to concentrate on routine instead of hype.

Holley also takes time to place the football event of Super Bowl XXXVI in context with history. This was the first Super Bowl to take place after the 9-11 attacks, so the atmosphere was definitely charged. He recalls how the media was looking for events

that would make a good terrorist target—the Super Bowl being one of the larger one of these.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Coach Belichick wanted his players to be prepared for as many contingencies as possible going into the Super Bowl. He also had the 'team' aspect stressed by not having the players introduced individually at Super Bowl XXXVI. The game started with the Rams returning the opening kick 38 yards which gave the Rams good starting field position; but the Rams' drive soon stalled and they kicked to the Patriots. The Patriots didn't manage to score, but they did manage to drive the ball from their own 2 yard line far enough to have the Rams start out on their own 20. Tom Brady was playing slowly but consistently; not panicking when the Rams took the lead with a field goal. Belichick made note that the Rams, although making progress on the field, were fighting harder than they were used to. The game was slow and demanding. As Belichick had hoped, the Rams were being thrown off their game by not being allowed big plays. They were wearing down when the Patriot's cornerback Ty Law intercepted a Warner throw to run it back 47 yards for the first touchdown of the game. The Patriots then stopped the Rams' next drive quickly and managed to possess the ball for almost five minutes. With eighty seconds before the half, the Patriots got the ball back on a Rams fumble and scored another touchdown in five plays. The score was 14-3 Patriots going into the half.

Vinatieri made the only score in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter to put the Pats up 17-3. But early in the fourth quarter, the tide began to turn after a fumble recovery holding penalty call against the Patriots. The Rams scored a quick touchdown, their first of the game, and the Patriots couldn't even get one first down before punting the ball back to the Rams and only using 90 seconds of clock time. Belichick felt it was just a matter of holding on. The Rams marched up the field and were finally stopped on a third-and-25 incomplete pass. However, again the Patriots couldn't get even one first down before turning the ball over to the Rams, who almost immediately scored another touchdown to tie the game at 17 with 1:21 on the clock. In a last minute effort, the Patriots made several plays to get the ball into field goal position and Vinatieri made the 48 yard kick to win.

After the team party that night, Director of Player Personnel Scott Pioli was already starting work on the next season on the plane home with Belichick.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 is a running commentary on Super Bowl XXXVI. Belichick realizes his own teams' flaws and uses time management to take the Rams. Holley picks up on the rare instance of Vinatieri, a field goal kicker, determining the outcome of a Super Bowl game.

It is very interesting how the author frames several events as influencing the outcome of the game. One is that Belichick makes the decision to introduce the Patriots as a team, as opposed to individuals. The point is made that this has an effect on morale early on.

He also shows how preparation and analysis really make a difference when it counts. The issue of players dealing with pressure by stressing routine is also shown to be successful.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

The 2002 Patriots season started badly. Belichick considered it "just bad football." He was not shy about putting pressure on his team when things weren't going well. The basics were being stressed above all else, and Belichick even gave his quarterbacks a six-page test to analyze their reasoning.

There is no room for misunderstanding due to not being blunt, and feelings were not spared in the staff meetings. Belichick has a vision of his team that he allows to be seriously questioned and analyzed by his advisers. This is the culmination of his experience; where he is confident enough in himself to surround himself with strong opinions. At this point, he is still several weeks away from publicly admitting that media expectations are putting stress on his team as defending champions.

He gets heated up over unnecessary game penalties like holding and off sides. Belichick thinks his players have lost the sense of "playing smart" that took them to the Super Bowl. He is in his element; always thinking, working, analyzing, planning; even bluffing when necessary. He asks players to critique what went wrong with a play, expecting input from all of them. He seriously asks the team to assist in fixing the play; expecting serious dialog and results the next time it's executed in a game. Belichick is an expert at placing obscenities to maximum effect but never ends a discussion on a negative note. He concludes by discussing solutions; always based on effort, discipline, and concentration.

Director of Player Personnel Scott Pioli is responsible for finding "the right kind of players" for the Patriots. At the time, the Patriots are 5-5 and under much pressure to perform. Scott explains after hanging up on a rude agent that "phone calls don't happen like this when you're winning." A free agent was trying to take advantage of the struggling Patriots situation. Pioli also gets "ambulance chasing" calls the day after one of his players is injured.

The worst fear for Belichick's staff is of a team breakdown; since they are ultimately responsible for team performance. Each has control and therefore accountability over a particular aspect of team performance. The whole group met at the local Norwood Sheraton on December 7, 2002 to discuss how to win. Some staff is exceptionally gifted, who will rise quickly through the ranks; but all are talented. Otherwise, they simply would not be there. Some coaches chat nonchalantly before the staff meeting, but when Belichick walks in the atmosphere is instantly serious. Belichick gets status reports from all staff and is not pleased. He is frustrated with the season and lets everyone know.

Belichick's coaching team truly respects hard work; often promoting based on this trait alone. Belichick knows his staff consists of the hardest workers available, and it gives





him confidence. He wants a promotion system based on merit alone. Several members of the staff had worked with Belichick while at the Giants, but it doesn't get them any special favors now.

The Patriots are up against the Buffalo Bills for the second time this season with a 7-5 record going into the game. They have closely reviewed the Bills passing principles from the first game. It is December 8 and they are playing at home in Foxboro this time. With several consecutive wins, there is a sense of having reversed the slide of the beginning of the season. The Patriots have prepared intensively against the Bills defensive coverage; the "cover 8." The coaches interact constantly via headset during the game, from warnings to "look out for a trick" to a congratulatory "good call"; all in real time.

The Bills are behind 10-0 and struggling in the first quarter when Bledsoe, the former Patriots' teammate, throws an interception that the Patriots quickly capitalize on. It is soon 20-0. Buffalo does manage to cut the lead in half at one point in the third quarter, but it is too much to overcome—especially with four Bledsoe interceptions. The Patriots come out of the game 8-5, with a feeling that the season is finally turning around.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter strips away the glamour and shows how difficult it can be to keep a football team together when they aren't playing well. Holley literally gets inside Belichick's staff meetings to see how he tries to find out how to fix the problems that are bothering the team. It also introduces the effect of defending Super Bowl champion stress and the added pressure of great expectations taking their toll.

Holley also brings up the return of Drew Bledsoe, this time from an opposing team.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Tom Brady recalled that the 2002 season had started off very well early on. He actually thought that they could go undefeated after a strong opening victory against the Steelers. The Patriots had four new additions to the team, and the new stadium had been completed that spring. But Belichick was very disappointed with the results of the free market talent. Several players just weren't performing, and the 2002 picks hadn't turned out nearly as well as the previous picks in 2001. He had one player who could make good plays but was disappointing overall. Belichick also had issues with a defensive tackle named Steve Martin who didn't impress him on the field and would gossip embarrassingly to the press. Martin was fired several games later for making disparaging remarks about the opposing team.

The season quickly turned for the worse and "last year nostalgia" was noted when the Patriots were 5-5; even though they had the same record the same time in 2001. The Patriots were badly beaten by the Titans and Tom Brady had his shoulder separated. They were 8-6 going up against the Jets and needed to win the next two games to definitely make the playoffs. Unfortunately, the Patriots lost 30-17 and Belichick noted poor coverage being a main reason. He also mentioned publicly for the first time the pressure of being a Super Bowl defender.

The next game was against the Miami Dolphins. It started out badly, with Miami leading 21-10 at the half, but the Patriots came back from a 24-13 deficit. With only five minutes left in the game, they tied the score; with a Vinatieri field goal coming in overtime to win the game. The Patriots had gotten their game back but it was too late to save the season. The Jets victory over the Green Bay Packers ended the Patriots' wild card chance at the playoffs.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

It is interesting to note that in 2002, after coming out as victors of the Super Bowl, the Patriots were seen as failures with a 5-5 record. Contrast this with the season before, when a 5-5 record was part of a momentum-building season that ended up with the Patriots winning the Super Bowl.

# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Belichick held a squad meeting the following Monday after the Jets game. It was an end of the season meeting and there was a feeling that many players and staff would not be coming back next season. Everyone was vulnerable. One of the talent scouts described the stress of always having to have potential talent waiting in the wings to replace the current talent. Belichick made no qualms about how disappointed he was in the just-concluded season. He didn't want to hear compliments about what had worked; he wanted to overhaul the team to make it work better. Belichick had all of his coaches review ten games and then he critiqued their evaluations.

After a short trip away with his family, Coach Belichick returned for a brutal team evaluation meeting. All players were up for discussion. Strengths and weaknesses were noted; as well as mental errors. They commented on performance, attitude, and the players' perceived abilities for next year. Belichick and his staff had a panoramic view of the team; and they decided to get rid of special teams member Patrick Pass and linebacker Ula Tuitiele.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Football can be a brutal sport; not just in the field play but also in the stress created by not knowing if your job will be there the next day. Job security is always a factor in this industry. Football doesn't give you a second chance if you have a bad day or make a mistake.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Scott Pioli, the head of Player Personnel, is intimate with Bill Belichick and has known him a long time. He is responsible for working closely with talent scouts and reviewing early draft information. He is also Bill Parcell's son-in-law. Pioli finds men who will fit the Patriots and replenish the system. Mistakes can be costly; low character / high maintenance players take a toll on the team. A low performing team creates job security worries and hostility.

Scouts must have a clear opinion, especially if they disagree with the coach. They discuss all aspects of potential drafts: diet, lifestyle, character, and communication skills. Scouts also must have sources and know who to talk to. A Patriot candidate must be able to be quantified in a uniform grading system. They use general groupings with grades such as 8-starter, 5-backup only, and 1-reject. Player dimensions are also graded from 1 (reject) to 9 (hall of famer). The number threshold on this scale is 6; not excellent, but capable of solid performance with room for growth.

Other categories taken into account as major factors include behavior, athletic ability, learning, durability, and competitiveness. These criteria apply across the board; but other factors and skills are position specific. Not coincidentally, the quarterback position skills mirror those of Tom Brady. They include being the hardest working player on the team, being able to shrug off a hit, and being able to listen to teammates.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 describes Scott Pioli's job in detail. Scouting is somewhat diabolical in that it constantly looks at the possibility of replacing current players with new talent. That aspect of the game has to assume that all players are expendable. It seems cruel, but since the team is expected to always perform as well as possible, it is necessary.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Coach meetings to prepare for the actual player draft are held in what is known as the draft room. Player rankings with names are arranged on a magnet board. Short interviews with potential drafts are available at an event known as "the combine," which is held in Indianapolis, Indiana. The combine is a phenomenon unique to the NFL. Players are dressed in shorts; wearing assigned numbers. Teams are allowed to interview up to sixty players for a maximum of fifteen minutes each. It is up to the coaches, scouts, and general managers doing the interviews to get the information they want. The Patriots focus on character and intelligence. Facts and feelings are discussed as well as lies and truths. Some players exaggerate, while others acknowledge mistakes. All information is weighed and evaluated.

Later at the draft room, names are being read from the live draft in New York while picks and ratings are reviewed. ESPN is on TV and massive scouting books are open on the tables. Overall, the Patriots are successful this time and end up getting many of their picks from the combine. Belichick feels much better about his defense. Kraft congratulates Belichick on his choices later.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

The draft is similar to nothing else except perhaps army-style basic training; where recruits are depersonalized by wearing numbers and allowed only fifteen minutes with possible recruiters. This information is used to rank and categorize recruits on a scale and basis selected by the teams.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

The Patriots experienced another slow down early in their following season. Belichick liked a player named Lawyer Miller. He had worked with him several years, but Belichick also considered him overpaid. When he had an average year in 2002, Belichick offered him a three percent pay cut. Miller balked at this and was released in the upcoming draft. This seemed to strike a nerve with the team, and usually loud practices turned quiet. Player talk focused around the subject of "could be me next." The morale issue was driven home when the Patriots were decimated by the Buffalo Bills in the first game of the season, 31-0. After the second game of the season, a friend of Parcells on ESPN named Tom Jackson made the comment that the Patriots "hate their coach." Belichick was furious. Jackson later offered Belichick his hand but no apology.

Belichick's policy of "supreme professionalism" was causing rifts. He believed that common sense was just sorting through emotions to make rational decisions, but this wasn't going over well in the media. In fact, the only columnist supporting Belichick's decision concerning Miller was Rush Limbaugh.

However, Coach Belichick was proving to be an expert at matching player abilities with their price tags. The problems came when the price tag overreached the abilities, but gradually he was building a teamwork structure not based on superstars like other teams. He forced his players to play to the best of their abilities. As a result, the 2002 Patriots were more coach-able. The players were better at listening and were more resourceful. They had wit and awareness. Belichick wanted them to play like they had something to prove; which they did. Above all, he rewarded effort.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to show that Belichick takes his vision of "supreme professionalism" seriously and uses it in real life. He takes the process of player selection and evaluation as a pure logic based event; with no sentiments getting in the way. This time it gets him into trouble in the media that sees him as heartless and uncaring. Belichick sees it as just making the best decisions to get the best team possible.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

In November 2003, Bill Belichick has five consecutive wins under his belt. He has just come off a pull-from-behind victory against the Denver Broncos in the final minutes of the game. The Patriots had taken an intentional safety while on their own 1-yard line to get decent field position and involve their special teams. Belichick was a strong believer in special teams, and this worked to his advantage. The Patriots ran six plays after the safety that ended in a touchdown for the win. Even the Denver defensive coach remarked that he was impressed. After the game, Coach Belichick spent much of his bye week spending time with his family and doing some occasional scouting.

Belichick then faced the Cowboys, led by Bill Parcells, for the first time since their 'split' in 2000. Belichick saw Parcells' weakness as the former mentor being too easily swayed by public opinion. Belichick had wanted more personnel control when he worked for the Jets and Parcells would not give it to him. After seeing the offer from Kraft for Belichick to become head coach, Parcells shrewdly offered Belichick the same position with the Jets. Belichick knew that Parcells would never give him the control he needed to truly manage the team, and so he went with Kraft to work again for the Patriots.

Belichick commented that he wanted no distractions about the upcoming game. Several members of his staff also had ties to Parcells so it made the situation more complicated. Romeo Crennel, Charlie Weis, and Scott Pioli had all worked with Parcells at some point in time. Both Pioli and Belichick had worked for Parcells with the Jets, and Pioli had met and fallen in love with Parcell's daughter; eventually marrying her.

Belichick made up 32 questions about the Cowboys to ask his players. Both Belichick and his players believed that being unprepared was an unacceptable reason to fail. The coaches watched Cowboy films repeatedly to try and predict how the Cowboys would react to their plays. They came up with several pointers for the team: force Dallas to pass, disguise coverage, no big plays, look for the blitz, and 3rd down conversions.

Parcells was nicknamed "the tuna." On game day, he had visited his daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter. In the beginning of the game, the Patriots preparation initially worked so well that they went 9-0. Dallas changed their strategy, stopped the blitz, and went to a zone defense. This made it more difficult for the Patriots to read and take advantage; they had not expected Dallas to adapt. It was a long game, but the Patriots did win 12-0. Belichick walked to midfield and Parcells gave him a hug. The long awaited confrontation was over.

The next week the Patriots came from behind to beat Houston 23-20 in overtime with the help of a Vinatieri field goal. They had a 9-2 record, having won the last seven games in a row. The team had progressed much from the start of the season.



The next game was versus the Indianapolis Colts. The Patriots dominated at first and were up 31-10 in the third quarter. The Colts had a strong fourth quarter comeback, and the Patriots found themselves up only 38-34 with 40 seconds to play and the Colts on their 2-yard line. In those last few seconds, the Patriots stopped four nerve-wracking plays in a row to win. Their dramatic style of football was beginning to be noticed and commented upon. They could make plays when they counted and produce plays when they had to.

Win number nine was in the snow over the Dolphins. Win ten, also in the snow, was over the Jaguars; and number eleven over the Jets. The next game was against the struggling Buffalo Bills and Drew Bledsoe. Since beating the Patriots in their first game 31-0, the Bills had faded to a 6-9 season and were playing badly again. The Patriots reversed their earlier performance with a 31-0 win. They were again going to the Super Bowl.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter wraps up several overhanging issues in Belichick's life. The main factor is his "nemesis," Bill Parcells. Belichick did work under him for more than a decade but developed his own style of coaching and grew apart. Now he faces his old boss as an equal on the field. There is a good lead up to "the game" but it is somewhat anticlimactic; the Patriots win easily and the old rivals make up. An interesting side to the story is that Belichick's Director of Player Personnel and good friend, Scott Pioli is Bill Parcell's son-in-law.

Belichick's team also goes up against the ex-Patriot Drew Bledsoe. It is a reversal of the beating they took earlier in the season. In fact; it is an exact reversal; the Pats rout the Bills 31-0, same as the Bills earlier routed them.

This chapter also documents the turnaround with Patriot performance that points them solidly towards the Super Bowl yet again. They get back their style of smart playing.





# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

A celebrity event was held at Houston's Reliant Arena January 26, 2004 in the startup to Super Bowl XXXVIII. Much had happened in the two years since the Patriots had first made a Super Bowl appearance. The first time they had been underdogs but now they were the proven team; going up against the underdog Carolina Panthers. They were coming in on a strong game winning streak of twelve in a row; the second highest in league history. They were now insiders. Belichick sat next to George H. W. Bush, with Robert Kraft and NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue on Bush's other side. Bush and Belichick had both attended Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. The President had spoken to Belichick's class in 1971, when he was the director of the CIA. He was also a good friend of Robert Kraft, who he had known for ten years.

Patriot quarterback Tom Brady felt prepared, and Belichick said that he was ready. However, Belichick also saw an alarming parallel between the '03 Panthers and the '01 Patriots. They both thought they were being overlooked and underestimated. The Panthers also had a clever offense. Belichick didn't consider it complicated; just something to prepare for. They had a changing play style and a good defensive line.

A Tampa Bay player stated that by creating gaps in the offensive and exploiting them, the Panthers could get to Brady. The Patriots were planning for this specific situation. They were always changing, updating, and analyzing their opponents.

There was more to worry about than just the game. Belichick had to have the practice field changed due to unsafe field conditions. He also discussed security with his team when an intruder was caught in the Patriot's hotel with a gun nearby.

The Patriots continued planning for any and all Panthers contingencies. Belichick wanted the buildup to be gradual so the team didn't peak too soon. Tom Brady had a good conversation at dinner the evening before the game with his backup quarterback Damon Huard. Brady said he thought about how different it had been when he was a shy unknown. In fact, he still considered himself shy around strangers; just not about football. Brady respected intelligence and realized that the game was up to him to a large part. He was a great leader and ready to step up to the challenge. He woke up on game day to his iPod; programmed with his 'motivational' music to get him in the proper mood. At noon before the game, the players reviewed the plan to exploit the Panther's weaknesses.

Both the Patriots and the Panthers were introduced as a team this time. Conventional wisdom seemed to favor a low scoring game, and there was still no score halfway through the second quarter. Vinatieri had already missed two field goal attempts. He was in physical pain due to an injury and feeling the loss of his favorite placer, who had been released earlier by the team.



With five minutes left in the first half, the Patriots got a turnover off of a sack and scored a quick touchdown. A Patriot coverage mistake led to an offsetting Panther touchdown. The Patriots then countered with another touchdown and the half ended with a Panther field goal. It was 14-10 with the Patriots in the lead. Then the infamous "wardrobe malfunction" occurred and halftime was over.

The third quarter was scoreless. The Patriots scored early in the fourth and were up by 11. The Panthers countered with a touchdown off of a 33-yard run, but missed the 2-point conversion attempt. Then the Panthers made an 85-yard pass-run combination and were up by 1 after another missed conversion. Brady led the Patriots back down the field to the Carolina 1 yard line. He then made a short pass for the touchdown and the team made the conversion to make the score 29-22. Even though their offense was strong, their defense was wavering; having lost two of their best safeties. The Panthers soon scored another touchdown after a 12-yard pass to tie the game. On the return, the Panther kicker put the ball out of bounds; giving the Patriots good starting position on their own 40 with 68 seconds left. New England moved the ball to the Panther 24 with 9 seconds remaining, and Vinatieri made the field goal to win.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

The Patriots have a difficult time when not acting in their usual position as the underdog. They prepare as much as possible, but the game is very tough on players. The Patriots hang on after losing several valuable players to win for the second time in three years.

# Epilogue

## Epilogue Summary

Belichick went into the 2004 player draft with 25 picks. He categorized them into first and second-day draftees depending on overall position. Many on his list were taken by the Patriots. Some were considered a 'bargain' by Belichick. The Patriots were well on the way to becoming one of the most respected teams in the league.



# Characters

## Bill Belichick

Head coach of the football team the New England Patriots from 2000-present. Has worked in football industry from 1975. Very detail oriented individual who requires excellence from all around him. He was born April 16, 1952 in Nashville, Tennessee. Attended Phillips Academy before graduating from Wesleyan in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in economics. Worked as staff assistant with Baltimore Colts in 1975, assistant special teams coach and later tight ends and receivers coach for the Detroit Lions in 1976/77, assistant special teams coach for the Denver Broncos in 1978. Married his wife Debby the same year. Joined the New York Giants in 1979 (working with defensive coordinator Bill Parcells), originally as a defensive assistant and special teams coach, later as linebacker coach and finally defensive coordinator (when Parcells was promoted to head coach). Was head coach of the Cleveland Browns from 1991-1995 (at the time, he was the NFL's youngest head coach). Improved Browns win record dramatically. Left the team when they moved to Baltimore. Worked under Parcells as defensive assistant for the New England Patriots in 1996 and followed him to the New York Jets, where he worked as assistant head coach to Parcells. Was hired by Robert Kraft to coach the New England Patriots on January 27, 2000. Under his coaching, the Patriots won three of four Super Bowls.

## Ted Marchibroda

Head coach of the Baltimore Colts in 1975 where Bill Belichick worked for him as assistant special teams coach. Introduced Bill to the concept of "living" the world of football continuously.

## Robert Kraft

Owner of the New England Patriots. Graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Business School. Began working at the Rand-Whitney Group after college; later buying the company. Founded International Forest Products in 1972. Bought the Patriots in 1994 and was responsible for having a new stadium built in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Since becoming owner, no NFL team has won as many Super Bowl or conference championships. His team has won three of the last four Super Bowls. Appointed chairman of the NFL's finance committee in 1998. Also formed his own holding company, the Kraft Group in 1998. Invested \$325 million of his own money to update Gillette Stadium (had originally purchased the stadium in 1988, before he actually bought the team).



## **Bill Parcells**

Head coach of the New England Patriots who left in 1997 after problems with the owner, Robert Kraft. Very opinionated individual and successful head coach who did not get along well with Kraft. Also worked for the Giants as defensive coordinator and later head coach before being hired by the Patriots in 1993. Went on to coach the Dallas Cowboys.

## **Tom Brady**

Quarterback for the New England Patriots. Born on August 3, 1977 in San Mateo, California. Majored in organizational studies at the University of Michigan where he had a 20-5 record. Drafted by the Patriots in 2000 in the sixth round. Is the first quarterback in NFL history to win two Super Bowls before turning 27. He is also the NFL's leader in overtime wins without a defeat (7-0). He also has the Super Bowl record for completing 32 passes in Super Bowl XXXVIII.

## **Adam Vinatieri**

Field Goal Kicker for the New England Patriots. Was signed in 1996 after a season with the Amsterdam Admirals of NFL Europe. Received the franchise player designation in 2002. Second player in NFL history to score at least 100 points in each of his first six seasons. One of only two Patriots to have 1,000 career points. Kicked winning field goals for the Patriots in Super Bowl XXXVI and XXXVIII.

## **Scott Pioli**

Director of Player Personnel for New England Patriots. Responsible for finding and keeping new talent for the team; including working very closely with talent scouts. Bill Parcell's son-in-law. Has known Belichick many years, since joining his staff with the Cleveland Browns in 1992. Followed Belichick to Jets where he worked as director of pro personnel. Joined Patriots in February 2000.

## **Romeo Crennel**

Defensive line coach and later defensive coordinator for the New England Patriots.

## **Charlie Weis**

Graduated from Notre Dame in 1978. Worked as position coach for Bill Parcells from 1993-1996 for the New England Patriots. Followed Parcells and Belichick to the Jets in 1997 and followed Belichick back to the Patriots to work as offensive coordinator in 2000.



## **Dick Rehbein**

Quarterback coach for the New England Patriots. Died in 2000.

## **Ernie Adams**

Longtime friend and advisor to Bill Belichick.

## **Steve Belichick**

Bill Belichick's father. Coached for 33 years at the Naval Academy.

## **Drew Bledsoe**

Born in 1972 and played college football at Washington State. Drafted by Patriots in 1993. Was the 'veteran' quarterback for the New England Patriots when Belichick took over as head coach in early 2001. When injured in midseason, was replaced by Belichick for newcomer Tom Brady. Left at end of 2001 season and went to Buffalo Bills where he still plays today.

## **Debby Clarke Belichick**

Bill Belichick's spouse since 1978.

## **Pete Carroll**

Head coach of New England Patriots from 1997-2000. Was replaced by Bill Belichick.



# Objects/Places

## Foxboro

Home city to the New England Patriots. In Massachusetts, near Boston.

## Super Bowl

Yearly season-ending championship game of the NFL to determine the best team of the season.

## Playoffs

Late season games to determine the Super Bowl contestants. Playoff teams determined by season record.

## The Combine

An NFL draft event where players are evaluated by prospective teams in a military-style fashion. Teams are given up to fifteen minutes to interview prospects and players are identified only by number.

## The Blitz

An defensive strategy where many defensive players rush the quarterback at once to give him the minimum amount of time to find one of his players to pass or hand off to. Generally effective against the pass.

## The NFL

The National Football League. The organization responsible for managing professional football in the United States.



# Themes

## Work Ethic

The theme of working hard to achieve excellence is developed and repeated throughout the story. There is also the special note that low-level "grunt" work is rewarded; as opposed to looked down on. The main case given is that Belichick started as an assistant for Baltimore Colts working for \$25 a week. Did every lowly job available, but in the process learned the system of professional football from the ground up. Worked many of the major positions available in later years, finally getting to the pinnacle: head coach.

His staff and players are expected to show the same drive and passion to do their best. Previous friends of his are given no favoritism in this system. Belichick's dream is for a pure meritocracy, where only performance and hard work are used to determine the worth of a player or staff member.

On the other side of this equation, non-performing members of the team are demoted and released from the team if deemed necessary.

## Pressure

The National Football League is a very competitive origination, from the top on down. Results definitely count. The owners want to make money, and they do this by winning games. The puts immense pressure on the head coach who in turn puts pressure on players and staff to perform or lose their jobs. The issue of pressure / job security is a constant threat to all in the organization. The players must be "scared straight" when necessary to be motivated to do their best, but yet morale must be maintained. Belichick gets rid of several popular players; which causes other players to question if they are next.

## Belichick versus Parcells

Belichick's logic-based management style is contrasted with Parcell's emotional style. Belichick works for Parcells long enough that he becomes identified with him and later has to work to differentiate himself. There is an anticlimactic moment where the two head coaches face off: student (Belichick) versus master (Parcells). Belichick's team wins and Parcells is gracious; they hug after the game





# Style

## Point of View

Holley's *Patriot Reign* is told in the second person, but the reader definitely gets the feeling that Holley is a 'fly on the wall' as the events of the story unfold. The whole structure of the Patriots as a working football team is examined through Holley's eyes as he pieces together all aspects of 'day to day' workings of the New England Patriots. He spends approximately two years following the team and documenting what he sees.

## Setting

The main setting of the story is with the Patriots from 2001 to 2004, but there are many flashbacks to some of the characters' pasts. Prime examples of this are Bill Belichick's career leading up to the Patriots and owner Robert Kraft's upbringing.

Most of the story is filtered from staff meetings in Foxboro; at the facility itself, hotel rooms, and in restaurants.

## Language and Meaning

The sometimes crude and complicated language of professional football is examined. This runs the gambit from using profanities at the right time to hype players before a game to picking apart opponent's strategies and explaining the information to the players.

The strict numbers-based logic behind the NFL draft is also explained in detail, where every skill and personality factor of an individual player must be assigned to a scale; to be compared to others in an effort to find the best fit for the team. This is necessary when the head coach cannot take the time to interview and evaluate all possible recruits; but instead have subordinates do the work. This creates the need for a common language, a common rating system that all can understand and use to make decisions.

## Structure

*Patriot Reign* is divided into an introduction, thirteen chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction sets up the author's proposition to Bill Belichick to write the book. Chapter 1 describes Belichick's past, including many of his pre-Patriots football experience. In Chapter 2, Kraft's background is discussed; as well as his relationship with Belichick. Chapter 3 documents Belichick becoming head coach of the Patriots and his early struggles. It also marks the hiring of Tom Brady and his succession to lead quarterback. Chapters four and five are about the lead up to and actual performance of the Patriots



at Super Bowl XXXVI. Chapter 6 explains the bad start of the following season; where defending champion stress takes its toll. Chapters seven and eight also follow the mostly bad times in this season that ended with the Patriots missing even the playoffs. The scouting system is examined in Chapter 9, followed by the player draft in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 again delves into low team morale. Coach Belichick goes up against his former boss Bill Parcells in Chapter 12 , and the Patriots win the Super Bowl for the second time in three years under Belichick's command in Chapter 13. The epilogue concludes the story with the following season's draft.



## Quotes

"Let's put it this way: when you're the head coach, you're the head coach twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. No matter what happens, it's on your watch and, to a degree, it's your problem." Chapter 1, pg. 5

"This is one of the great moments of my life. This is why our family got into the sports business. We have built something special here, and we owe it to the efforts of our players and our coaching staff. I can't even describe the feeling. I'm ecstatic. I'm happy. I'm content." Chapter 2, pg. 27,8

He was a hardworking guy, he had been in the organization for a long time, and I respected that. Nobody wanted him to get hurt and miss two months. There was nothing we could do about it. You don't take a player who hasn't played in two months and then just stick him back in there like nothing had happened." Chapter 3, pg. 47

"I get a hundred calls like that a week. The best is when you're losing games and they call you and tell you, 'Yeah, you guys are really struggling. It looks like you need some help on the offensive line.' I mean, how would you react to that? It's so insulting." Chapter 6, pg. 93

"Until they have some success against us, there's got to be some doubt. They don't know if they can beat us." Chapter 6, pg. 101

"I can't always put my values onto people. But here is what I know: my job is to find players for a head coach who wants football to be the most important thing in their worlds. I believe in it." Chapter 9, pg.148

# Topics for Discussion

Explain coach Belichick's intolerance of failure, specifically lack of preparation.

What factors contributed to the Patriots success in their first Belichick Super Bowl win (XXXVI)?

Elaborate on some of Bill Belichick's early failures that he learned from to lead the Patriots.

Contrast Bill Belichick's coaching of the Patriots with that of the Browns.