The Weekly Chowdah:

THE PACKERS GAME WAS A MICROCOSM OF THE PATRIOTS' PROBLEMATIC SEASON



The Green Bay Packers celebrate their win against the Patriots on Nov. 8. The Packers won 45-27.
PHOTO COURTESEY OF GREEN BAY PACKERS ON FACEBOOK

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The New England Patriots Week 9 matchup against the Green Bay Packers on Nov. 8 was supposed to be a fun one for Patriots fans and the organization.

Legendary individuals from the team's history descended on Foxborough to celebrate tight end Rob Gronkowski's induction into the Patriots Hall of Fame a day before. Festivities continued on game day as the Super Bowl LI team was also honored.

Unfortunately, things went south quickly. In a rather ugly game, the Green Bay Packers decimated New England in a 45-27 rout. Since the opening of Gillette Stadium in 2002, it's the most points the team has ever surrendered at home.

If this performance was an outlier among the broader 2026 season, it would be easy to "burn the tape" and simply move on from it. After all, Green Bay remains a great team, and it would otherwise be hard to fault the team for the loss.

The reality, however, is that Green Bay exposed issues present throughout the entire season. Some of these issues were seen in a tough September, and others were persistent, but masked, as the team won four games in October and quarterback Drake Maye won Player of the Month.

Maye, despite the October performances, clearly still has much to work on with turnovers continuing to be a major issue.

Against Green Bay, Maye registered three interceptions, bringing his season total to 11, which is tied for first in the league. This is yet another multi-turnover game for him as well, and in those games the Patriots are 1–4.

Of course, not all of these interceptions can be blamed on him. On Sunday alone, his first interception seems to be a result of a miscommunication with wide receiver Mack Hollins, who stopped his route short of where Maye threw. Later in the game, Maye almost threw a fourth pick for the same reason targeting wide receiver Demario Douglas.

Simultaneously, Maye's decision making and passing on some throws continues to be poor at times.

On his third interception, Tom Brady audibly reacted to the pass well before it was picked off while commentating the game for FOX. He later elaborated that the ball needed a quicker release and more velocity given the quarters' coverage.

The team is tied for first in total turnovers at 19, a statistic Maye contributes the most to. Regardless of how they are happening, New England's franchise quarterback needs to figure out how to limit them, because it's a major reason for the teams' current losses.

Another issue seen consistently throughout the season is the sheer number of penalties committed. The team has accrued 67 so far, which is eleventh most in the league. On Sunday, New England recorded 14 compared to Green Bay's three.

Some of these penalties seem to happen at very inopportune moments as well. For example, against a Green Bay rookie, New England linebacker Gabe Jacas was flagged on a third down and on a fourth down that handed the opponents drive-extending first downs.

Discipline is ultimately the coaches' responsibility, so this begs the question of how much time New England spends working on fundamentals. Other core aspects of the game, such as tackling, have also been an issue as of late, which further emphasizes that interrogative.

The most glaring issue from the game is New England's defense. After having carried the team throughout the 2025 playoffs, they have proven to be inconsistent at best in big games.

Quarterback Jordan Love tore apart the defense, completing 23 of 29 pass attempts for 372 yards and three touchdowns, yielding a near perfect passer rating. 335 of those yards and two of those touchdowns came from Wide receivers Christian Watson and Mathew Golden, mainly on mid-to-deep level passes.

With the amount of talent this unit has, giving up those stats just aren't acceptable. It's creating game situations where the offense must play near-perfect football to compete with the opposing team.

There is a lot of pressure on Maye, who is forced to play more "hero ball" due to the number of injuries on his side of the ball. This leads to more mistakes for a group that is becoming more error-prone by the week.

Cornerback Christian Gonzalez's performance was particularly poor against Green Bay. According to Next Gen Stats, Gonzalez allowed two different players to attain 80-plus receiving yards (Watson and Golden) for a total of 187 yards, the first player since 2018 to do so.

Patriots staff writer Evan Lazar points out in his own game observations that this isn't necessarily a "man" vs "zone" issue, countering an emerging narrative among fans. He wasn't good in either coverage type.

This game follows a streak of bad showings for Gonzalez, who hasn't been up to standards against the Chicago Bears or Miami Dolphins either.

Head coach Mike Vrabel made it clear in the post-game press conference that these types of performances from the team's best players were unacceptable in the NFL.

"When your best players don't play good, you don't have much of a chance in this league," Vrabel said, "we expect a lot more, from him and everybody else."

New England's upcoming schedule includes three more games against top-ten defenses and another two against other playoff-caliber opponents. So far, the team has not really shown that they can remain competitive enough to win at least some of these five games.

If anyone is to rationally believe that New England belongs in the playoffs, they are going to have to prove it over the next couple of months. Though technically a rebuilding team, expectations have been raised, and the margins seem narrower than anticipated.

The performance that we saw against Green Bay, and have seen a couple times previously, simply isn't good enough.



Drake Maye passes to Mack Hollins in a game against the Green Bay Packers. The Patriots lost 45-27.
PHOTO COURTESEY OF NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS ON FACEBOOK



The University of North Carolina's current football coach, Bill Belichick. Belichick used to coach the New England Patriots from 2000-2023.
PHOTO COURTESEY OF @NFL ON INSTAGRAM

BELICHICK DELIVERS STATEMENT WIN DURING NEW ENGLAND REUNION

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Bill Belichick made his return to New England for the first time since coaching the New England Patriots. Belichick coached the Patriots from 2000 to 2023, reaching nine Super Bowls and winning a record six titles as a head coach. He went 30-12 in the postseason and finished with an overall record of 296-133 with the team.

On Jan. 11, 2024, Belichick and the Patriots agreed to part ways. Former quarterback Tom Brady, a seven-time Super Bowl winner, reacted to the news on Instagram, calling him "the best coach in the history of the NFL," according to ESPN.

On Dec. 11, 2024, Belichick was named head coach at the University of North Carolina. He made his Tar Heels debut on Sept. 1, 2025.

In his second season with North Carolina, Belichick returns north to New England to face the Connecticut Huskies.

"Connecticut was one of the first schools besides Navy that I really took an interest in," Belichick said in a press conference ahead of the game.

Belichick was once considered for the Huskies' head coaching job, but the school went in a different direction, hiring Jason Candle from Toledo.

"We're not playing the New England Patriots from 15 years ago. We're playing the North Carolina Tar Heels, and thank God Tom Brady is not walking out of that locker room Saturday," said Coach Candle in his weekly pregame press conference.

Despite all of Belichick's success in the NFL, college football is completely different, with players in and out of programs within a few years. Belichick holds an 8-11 record through his first two seasons with the Tar Heels, proving college football is a different environment compared to the professional level.

UConn fans have additional excitement with this game besides the fact they are facing the Tar Heels. It's the Huskies' third Power Four opponent they've hosted this season, falling in the previous two matchups.

Hours before kickoff, the tailgates outside Pratt and Whitney Stadium filled with fans from both sides, and many had strong feelings about Belichick's return.

"It's New England, and a lot of fans are Patriot fans. I'm one of them," said Jim Haley. "I want him to do well, but we're rooting against him today."

Some fans enjoyed seeing Belichick on the sideline, even if it was on the opposing side. For others, they dealt with him enough in the NFL and didn't want to play him in college.

"Well, I'm not a big Bill Belichick fan, so I'm hoping to see him lose just like I did when he was with the Patriots," said Jim Indelicato.

Indelicato is a Buffalo Bills fan, a team the New England Patriots commonly faced being in the same division.

The teams took the field, and many fans gathered near the tunnel to grab the closest photo of Belichick as he returned to New England.

Both teams struggled to find the end zone early after UNC quarterback Billy Edwards Jr. threw an interception in the Tar Heels' opening drive. The Huskies then marched down the field but missed a 45-yard field goal attempt wide left.

It was the defense for Carolina that put them on the board first with a 70-yard pick-six by Timir Hickman-Collins. Collins had an all-star performance on defense for the Tar Heels, adding a fumble recovery to his achievements.

An explosive second quarter fueled North Carolina, scoring 21 points. Edwards Jr. shared the wealth, finding Jordan Shipp and Jelani Thurman after Benjamin Hall ran for a 39-yard touchdown.

UConn tried to stay with UNC but stayed behind 28-14 at the half. A quick score in the third quarter brought the Huskies within a score, but the Tar Heels ended the game with a field goal and a late touchdown to finish the job, winning 38-21.

"They put a lot of pressure on us. We had a little trouble with that early," said Belichick after the game. "In the end, proud of our guys stepping up."

The win was big for Belichick, but he was happy to share it with his players.

"It means a lot to me for the team; I'm happy for the team. We lost two tough games the past two weeks. I'm happy today things worked out for them, and they're able to celebrate in the locker room. It's great," said Belichick.

A big weekend for New England's championship-winning coach, as he made his first return to the place he built his legacy.

For one Saturday, the man who defined an era in New England was a visitor.