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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2013

## F5 TORNADOES ARE FOR WIMPS: IS TOM BRADY AN ELITE 2013 FANTASY QUARTERBACK?

Wow, what a whirlwind.



I feel like Bill Paxton in that movie "Twister" where he gets stuck in the eye of giant tornado at the end. And who can forget the poorly rendered cow flying in the air, caught in the tornado? I'm sure the cow was thinking "this is so much more awesome than walking! But I'm a little confused as to how I'm supposed to eat any grass while flying around in the air. And I'm getting a little dizzy." This all before the poor cow realized that falling was the real downside to flying. But I digress.

The Patriots must feel like I feel, but times ten. With Aaron Hernandez getting waived by the Patriots due to recent events worthy of a "Law & Order" episode (and after watching the arraignment, I have to say that it doesn't look good for the former star tight end), and with Rob Gronkowski undergoing his fifth surgery in a year (a "lumbar discectomy", which I have no idea what that is but it sounds horrible), Tom Brady's options are starting to thin out. And this after his favorite target over the last six years, Wes Welker, goes to Denver to catch passes from arch rival Peyton Manning, and Brandon Lloyd was let go. Is Tom Brady still an "elite" fantasy quarterback in 2013? Well, let's break that down.



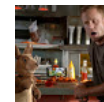
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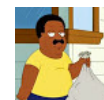
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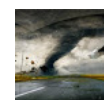


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F5 Tornadoes Are For Wimps: Is Tom Brady



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We should start with what Brady WILL have at the beginning of the season. Gronk is predicted to be on a 12-week recovery schedule from his June 18 surgery, which arguably would allow him to return in time for Week 1 if he has Adrian Peterson-like (or Wolverine-like) healing powers. But judging from the multitude of surgeries he's been through, I'm not going to bank on that. And seeing as how the Patriots now need to be careful with their prized tight end, having no other proven play makers on the receiving end of the roster, I wouldn't be surprised if Gronk sits out the first 2 or 3 games of the season. And there's always the possibility that he's placed on the PUP list to begin the season, which would entail missing the first 6 games, plus not practicing for those weeks, so he could be out much longer.



So if you count Gronk out for at least week one, what does the Patriot receiving corp look like? I would assume you'd have Jake Ballard at tight end, Danny Amendola at slot wide receiver, and some combination of Julian Edelman, Michael Jenkins and Aaron Dobson filling it out. Wow.

Believe it or not, in that setup, Julian Edelman would be the only player to have caught pass from Brady before. And Danny Amendola is the anti-thesis of durable. Amendola has only played 11 of 32 games over the last two seasons. If he follows that pattern in New England, that basically guarantees him missing at least half the games this season. And as we've seen with Welker over the years, the slot receiver in New England gets hit. A lot. Amendola is bigger than Welker, but Welker could take hits across the middle of the field like no one else. I have my doubts that Amendola can survive 16 games if the Patriots don't modify their offense to allow him to go outside more often than across the middle. And although having someone familiar with the system will be helpful, Edelman is himself perennially injured. He did start ahead of Wes Welker for three games in 2012 before his left hand injury, but never had any real opportunities after he got healthy. Michael Jenkins has never been that fast, but last year he really struggled in Minnesota trying to get separation. He's 30 now and he's not going to get any faster. Even in his best years in Atlanta, he never reached 800 yards in a season (and his average is closer to 500 yards per season). In his 9 year career, he's had only 1 game of over 100 yards. I don't see why any of that would change this year, if he even sticks as a starter in New England. And of course Aaron Dobson is the real wild card. He's a big and fast receiver that demonstrated a forty time of 4.42 at his Pro Day. He'll have some work to do in the Patriots' complicated passing scheme, but he's the type of player who can take the top off defenses. But he's a rookie, and it's a rare exception that we have a rookie wide receiver breakout without any bumps in the road (a la A.J. Green). And lastly, Jake Ballard. In all honesty, although he has decent hands, Ballard actually excels most at being a blocker. He can be solid paired with Gronk, but I question his ability as a pass catching tight end without him. There are two other wild cards on the roster - Zach Sudfeld (rookie tight end who actually was a Mackey Award semifinalist for best college tight end in the nation) and Josh Boyce (another fast rookie wide receiver). But again, one rookie in an offense is tough enough. I doubt an all-rookie squad would help Brady become successful in 2013.

an Elite 2013 Fantasy Quarterback?

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So where does that leave Brady? Well, he's going to have a tough time with basically a completely new receiving corp. But he does have two things going for him. First is the newly improved ground game in New England, with Steven Ridley and Shane Vereen leading the way. They were much more effective on the ground in 2012 than they have been in years, and I expect that to continue (2184 rushing yards and 25 rushing TDs in 2012, compared to just 1764 rushing yards and 18 rushing TDs in 2011 – in fact, you need to go back to 2008 to get near the same yards, and they still had 4 less rushing TDs that year, and it gets much worse before that). Second is that he's Tom Brady. I'm not a fan, but since starting in 2001, Brady has never had a completion percentage under 60%, and that's with a multitude of different tight ends and receivers. And absent his injury year, since starting, his rating has never been below 85.9. And, absent his injury year in 2008 which was fluke accident, he doesn't miss games. The guy is about as steady and reliable as steady and reliable can be.

So is Tom Brady an "elite" fantasy quarterback in 2013? Depends on what you mean by "elite". If you mean will he be reliable week in and week out continuing to average 250 yards and almost 2 TDs per game, as he's done for 11 years (not including the injury year)? I'd say yes, I think you're going to get that. But is there any upside here that indicates he'll be better than that? Probably not.

In 12-team leagues, I'd target him in the early 3rd round behind Aaron Rodgers, Drew Brees and just behind Peyton Manning. And after you do, I'd hope that there aren't any more surprises in this F5 tornado of a mess.



By Ha Kung Wong (Twitter: [@Rhihan](#))

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### 3 comments:



**Phil** July 3, 2013 at 4:02 AM

Tom Brady is not having the best off season when it comes to his receiving corps. but he will still shine. He's not a Top 5 quarterback coming into the season, but don't completely downgrade him. And

I'm also expecting Gronk to miss no more than 4 games max.

### 2013 Fantasy Football Updates

Reply

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**Hakung Wong** July 8, 2013 at 10:44 AM

I agree that Gronk will likely not miss more than 4 games to start the season, but he's had a little bit of an injury history now in light of last year, so I'm still a bit wary. On the other hand, I do believe Tom Brady is indeed Tom Brady and will find a way to be productive to the tune of 200-250 yards and 1-2 TDs per week with less than an INT per game. All in all, a solid starting QB in anyone's fantasy roster. But someone I would target as the 4th or 5th QB off the board. So I'm a little higher on him in that I still think he's top 5 (but just barely), but I agree with your assessment. Thanks for reading!

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Reply



**Hakung Wong** July 17, 2013 at 2:37 PM

Just a note, that on July 11, two weeks after this article, Mathew Bery and Nate Ravitz of ESPN covered this same topic and came up with roughly the same advice. They recommended a pick around 31-40 (I recommended early third in at 12 team league, so around picks 25-32). (<http://espn.go.com/espnradio/play?id=9469652>)

Mathew Bery has Brady as the number 4 fantasy QB this year after Rodgers, Brees and Manning, which is exactly what I recommend above. ([http://espn.go.com/fantasy/football/story/\\_/page/2013preseasonFLranksQB/top-50-quarterbacks](http://espn.go.com/fantasy/football/story/_/page/2013preseasonFLranksQB/top-50-quarterbacks))

Just saying, keep it tuned it here! I got more fantasy advice for you throughout the season!

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