

The AFC Championships- Nightmare for New England

- Drew Faria

Omaha- the unofficial most-despised word in New England since the AFC Championship game. It is also quarterback Peyton Manning's favorite play call that proved fatal to the Patriots' defense. Manning and the Bronco's offense charged down the field with long passes (several caught by ex-Patriot Wes Welker). On the other hand, Tom Brady had a tough time rallying his troops- not scoring a touchdown until the sixth minute in the fourth quarter! While his own touchdown incited some optimism and vigor for the eager East Coast fans, the Patriots proved unable to pull off one of their famous last-minute wins. The Broncos defense countered New England brilliantly. They made LeGarrette Blount's efforts blunt, and the linebackers blocked Danny Amendola from receiving a single catch- attacking the Patriots where it hurt most. Thanks to Shane Vereen, Julian Edelman, and rookie Austin Collie, the Patriots managed to put at least some life into their offense. Sadly, this marks the end to a triumphant roller-coaster ride of a football season. The Patriots' resilience in all of the lineup changes shows that they truly deserve to earn an AFC, and maybe even a Superbowl, title of their own.

From Day 1 this season, the Patriots had their hands full, or perhaps, less than full. We all know what happened to their promising tight end Aaron Hernandez. Vince Wilfork and Jerod Mayo, two key defensive players, have been out for the season due to various injuries. Others like Aqib Talib and Rob Gronkowski have missed big portions of the season for injuries too. These players left big shoes to fill for the inexperienced rookies. Jamie Collins and Aaron Dobson stood out as filling these shoes the best. With all of these setbacks, it shocks me that they earned a spot in the playoffs, let alone the AFC Championship. The question now: what will New England have in store for next season?

I believe that the Patriots will still be a strong opponent to be reckoned with come next fall. With all of the old faces back in good health (maybe even Gronk), the lineup will look much sharper. Julian Edelman and LeGarrette Blount will certainly be offered big contracts after their performances this year too. Of course, Tom Terrific is here to stay as well. The newcomers and reserve players from this year will get more time to apply their new skills in the offseason as well. The media dramatized this championship game by saying that it was the last time in a while that the Patriots or the Broncos would earn such high playoff spots due to their senior quarterbacks. The Patriots still have quite a lot of young talent in them that will keep them up with the top competitors for quite a bit. He may never show it, but Bill Belichick is probably smiling in his sleep as he dreams of next season.