

## **Patriots Blast Panthers, 30-7**

Written by Max Henson

Saturday, 23 August 2014 19:39

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Preseason or not, the Panthers know they are significantly better than what they showed in Friday's 30-7 loss to the New England Patriots at Gillette Stadium.

"Disappointing; I expected a better performance," head coach Ron Rivera said. "There was no consistency in the way we played."

Said linebacker Thomas Davis: "We know what kind of team we are and what kind of defense we are capable of playing. We didn't do that tonight."

Both defenses were in control at the start as first-quarter scoring was limited to a 47-yard field goal by New England's Stephen Gostkowski, which was set up by a 30-yard punt return by Julian Edelman.

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Tom Brady and the Patriots offense found their rhythm in the second quarter, with the future Hall of Fame quarterback engineering a 14-play, 91-yard drive that ended with a 40-yard touchdown pass to running back Shane Vereen on a wheel route.

"(Linebacker A.J. Klein) got beat to the flat, and the back was able to turn up to the end zone and score," Rivera said.

Gostkowski converted a 60-yard field goal in the closing seconds of the second quarter to give New England a 13-0 lead at halftime.

Quarterback Cam Newton and his counterpart Brady each took the field for one series in the third quarter. Newton and the Panthers punted after gaining seven yards. Brady and the Patriots found the end zone thanks to an eight-play, 80-yard drive that once again ended with a touchdown pass to Vereen.

Brady, who wasn't sacked once, completed 17-of-21 passes for 204 yards. Despite New England's propensity for getting the ball out quickly, Rivera lamented his team's inability to make Brady uncomfortable in the pocket.

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"I'm disappointed in the pass rush, I really am," Rivera said. "We didn't have it going. Give them credit, they protected their quarterback, and he got the ball out when he needed to."

Added defensive end Greg Hardy, who left the game after aggravating a shoulder injury: "We expected a whole lot of max protection and chipping, and we expected to get back there and sack him but it didn't happen. We should have gotten a whole lot more pressure. That affected the outcome of the game tremendously."

Newton finished 8-of-12 for 88 yards and was sacked three times. He sat out one play after taking a hit to the back and experienced soreness after the game.

"He got the wind knocked out of him, and he's sore," Rivera said. "But there's nothing there. There really isn't. He took X-rays just to make sure, and those were negative."

Gostkowski added a 21-yard field goal in the fourth quarter before rookie quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo tossed an 11-yard touchdown pass to Taylor McCuller to give New England a 30-0 lead with just under four minutes remaining.

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The Panthers got on the board on the ensuing possession. Quarterback Joe Webb came into the game in relief of an injured Matt Blanchard and connected with wide receivers Kealoha Pilares and Toney Clemons for 30 and 31 yards respectively.

Webb then found tight end D.C. Jefferson open in the end zone for a 3-yard touchdown with little more than a minute remaining.

Jefferson's touchdown erased the shutout but didn't leave the Panthers feeling much better about their offensive performance.

"It's a bad night. I don't think that's indicative of the type of offense we are going to be at all," tight end Greg Olsen said. "We have to do a better job sustaining drives. And when we cross over to their side of the field, finish them with some kind of points."

Carolina finishes the preseason Thursday night at the Pittsburgh Steelers. After Friday's defeat, Rivera said the starters - and Newton in particular - will see action.

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"Yes, we'll play (the starters)," Rivera said. "We have to get them out there. We have to get our quarterback out there. He has to get some timing with those guys. He's just got to continue to work with them, and the more snaps he gets, the better."