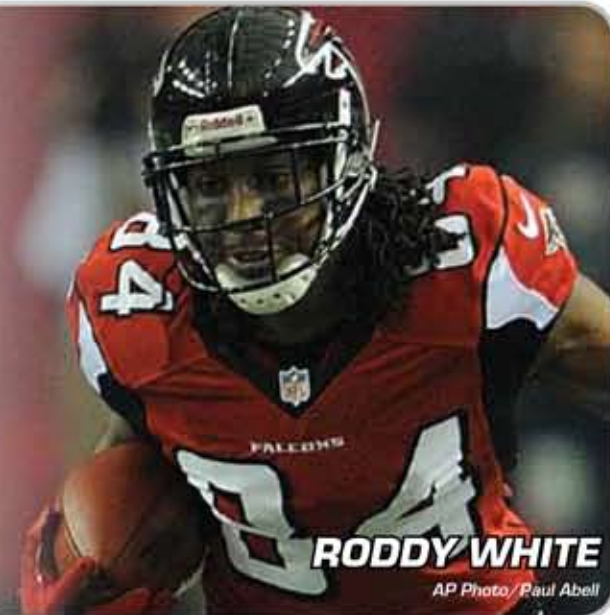




**AQIB TALIB**  
AP Photo/Paul Jasienski



# SCOUTING THE MATCHUPS



**RODDY WHITE**  
AP Photo/Paul Abell

## WHEN THE PATRIOTS RUN

The Patriots running game has yet to hit its stride in 2013 and it won't get much easier in Atlanta. New England has recorded a couple of big plays on the ground but hasn't sustained much since Week 1. The Falcons have performed well against the run thus far with an active front that includes Corey Peters and Jonathan Babineaux. However, the Falcons will be without Sean Weatherspoon, the best member of the front seven, due to a foot injury. That will put the burden on middle backer Akeem Dent and Weatherspoon's replacement Joplo Bartu. Despite the health concerns, the Patriots running game does not appear consistent enough to enter into many games with the edge. Expect Atlanta to control Stevan Ridley and the ground game.

**ADVANTAGE: FALCONS**

## WHEN THE FALCONS RUN

Atlanta is not a ground-oriented team, and with Steven Jackson expected to miss the game with a thigh injury that should continue. Jason Snelling and Jacquizz Rodgers will get the carries in Jackson's absence and the Patriots front seven should be able to prevent either from making a huge impact, although backs with Rodgers' scatback style have given New England periodic problems in the past. Don't expect the Falcons to waste much time trying to establish the run, especially with Vince Wilfork, Tommy Kelly and Co. coming off a solid performance stopping Doug Martin last week against Tampa Bay. And given Atlanta's weapons in the passing game, chances are it won't be interested in trying to anyway.

**ADVANTAGE: PATRIOTS**

### RUSHING

Patriots Offense ... 122.7



Falcons Defense ... 79.0



### RUSHING

Patriots Defense ... 120.7



Falcons Offense ... 90.0



## WHEN THE PATRIOTS PASS

Things haven't quite taken off in the passing game as of yet. Tom Brady is still working to find a comfort level with his rookie receivers, and until he gets his weapons back that may continue. Rob Gronkowski and Danny Amendola remain on the mend and are uncertain to play, but all signs point toward a return for the tight end. That's welcome news for Brady, who could use the added help against a pedestrian secondary, but one with playmakers such as safeties Thomas DeCoud and William Moore as well as Asante Samuel. Rookie Desmond Trufant mans the other corner while Robert McClain serves as the nickel back, a spot that has been a weakness for the Falcons. If the Patriots can get on the same page, this group can be exploited.

**ADVANTAGE: PATRIOTS**

## WHEN THE FALCONS PASS

The Falcons can throw the football, assuming Matt Ryan gets the time. With a vast array of weapons that includes Julio Jones, Roddy White, Harry Douglas and future Hall of Fame tight end Tony Gonzalez, few teams have the personnel to match up. But the Falcons offensive line doesn't allow Ryan to take advantage of these favorable matchups. Left tackle Sam Baker has been banged up and even when healthy is average at best. Ryan has been outstanding when given the time, so the Patriots edge guys Chandler Jones and Rob Ninkovich need to turn up the heat and take it away from him. If they fail to deliver, the Falcons will rack up big numbers in the passing game.

**ADVANTAGE: FALCONS**

### PASSING

Patriots Offense ... 217.1



Falcons Defense ... 296.0



### PASSING

Patriots Defense ... 188.3



Falcons Offense ... 289.0



## SPECIAL TEAMS

Both teams have enjoyed solid play from their special teams units in the early going. Kicker Matt Bryant hasn't been called on often but has delivered while punter Matt Bosher, who also handles kickoff duties, makes it difficult to get much going in the return game. The latter fact may be important given Julian Edelman's impact on punt returns. Thus far in 2013 the Falcons are allowing less than 2 yards per return, and Bosher has had nearly half of his kicks downed inside the 20. Stephen Gostkowski and rookie Ryan Allen have been similarly effective, although with Matthew Slater out with a wrist injury the Patriots coverage units could take a hit. Neither Rodgers (kicks) nor Douglas (punts) has been particularly effective in the return game.

**ADVANTAGE: PATRIOTS**

## OTHER FACTORS

After opening the season with three games against teams that finished 2012 with losing records, not to mention less-than-formidable quarterbacks, this will be the Patriots first true test of the season. The Falcons have Super Bowl aspirations and they get the Patriots in their building on Sunday night. The atmosphere figures to be electric, which may spell even more trouble for a struggling offense and a group of young receivers. Atlanta is dealing with plenty of health issues but there is still plenty of talent and the home crowd to deal with. The Falcons are coming off an emotional road game in Miami, their first without several injured players. With another week to prepare, Atlanta will be better suited to deal with those personnel losses.

**ADVANTAGE: FALCONS**

### THIRD DOWN OFFENSE %

Patriots ... 39.6



Falcons ... 42.9



### THIRD DOWN DEFENSE %

Patriots ... 33.3



Falcons ... 47.6

