

Bad forecast can't faze Patriots' QB Matt Cassel

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Matt Cassel has passed a number of tests since he's taken over for Tom Brady.  
JETS BATTER RAMS

Thursday, when the Patriots and Jets meet for first place in the AFC East, he'll face another as Mother Nature puts on pads.  
JETS MIDSEASON REPORT CARD

They are calling for rain and strong winds at Gillette Stadium, which will mark the SoCal product's first weather-affected game. Before taking over for Tom Brady with his first start in balmy Week 2, Cassel hadn't started a game since high school, so he may be battling the elements (and sub-40 degree wind chill) for the first time in his life - at least when it counts.

"Well, when you play in New England we've had plenty of practices out there in cold weather and wet weather so we'll be fine out there," he said. "We're just going to go out there and play. You have to deal with the conditions. I don't know what the conditions are going to be. What are the conditions going to be?"

Told about the rain, he said. "Oh great, I'm looking forward to that."

Cassel's counterpart, Brett Favre, may be the best foul weather quarterback of all time from his days on the tundra, although he didn't exactly live up to the rep in the NFC Championship Game at frigid Lambeau Field last season.

The Patriots may have had more problems in these conditions last year when they were throwing it all over the lot. Belichick has been more conservative since losing Brady, relying on a ball-control offense that ranks fourth in the NFL in time of possession.

Cassel beat the Jets in his first start, 19-10, on Sept. 14, by throwing underneath all day, but the Patriots have expanded the offense for him since then. He's now confidently attacking the intermediate areas of the field and last week tried to go deep to Randy Moss. In the meantime, he and Wes Welker have established a pretty good rapport.

Cassel also said he would not be affected by the short preparation week. "Not at all. I feel fine," he said. "This is just part of what we do. You've got to adjust to things on the run and we've got to adjust to this and they do, too. I'm sure both teams are out there trying to get the game plan set in stone and get ready to go for tomorrow night."

No matter what the conditions are, they could have been worse. Gillette Stadium's original grass

field always became a quagmire until the team replaced it with FieldTurf in the middle of the 2006 season. It was a sloppy loss to the Jets, their only loss to Gang Green in their last 12 meetings, that convinced the Patriots to install artificial turf.