

He threw only five passes this year, but *Tom Brady's understudy* is always a play away from being the leading man

FIRST PERSON

# Matt Cassel

PATRIOTS SECOND-STRING QB

**On being a backup, which he also was at USC before the Pats drafted him in 2005**

There's stress. You never know when you're going to get on the field. But I haven't suffered many bumps and bruises. And the advantage of a rested arm is that it's ready to rock and roll.

**On his sideline headgear**

My friends ask, "Why wear your helmet? You're not going in." What I do is listen to the play call [through a helmet headset].

Then I say the call aloud as if I were in the huddle. When I watch the play, I go through the mental reps. This way if I'm called on, it won't feel like the first time I'm in the huddle.

**On the Pats' starter, whom he used to call Mr. Brady**

I stopped calling him that midway through my rookie year—he became TB or Tom. He's mentored me. On football operational stuff, on my demeanor, on how to respond in the huddle.

**On his mom, Barbara, a TV set designer who won a 2007 Emmy for *Tony Bennett: An American Classic***

We look up to her. She and my dad [Greg, a TV writer] had four children, and she worked from 5:30 a.m. until seven at night, never complaining. She still does it. It's a lesson: When there's work, you've got to go do it. No shortcuts.

**On USC's Pro Day in 2005**

I didn't get to go to the combine,

and I only threw 33 passes in college. But when I threw well on Pro Day it sparked interest in me. People realized I'd played behind two Heisman winners in Carson Palmer and Matt Leinart. That day catapulted me into getting drafted.

**Playing in the Super Bowl**

It's everyone's dream, and it's been mine since I was nine in Pop Warner. Maybe I'll get in the game. I'd love to say, "I'm going to Disney World!"

—As told to Joe Lemire