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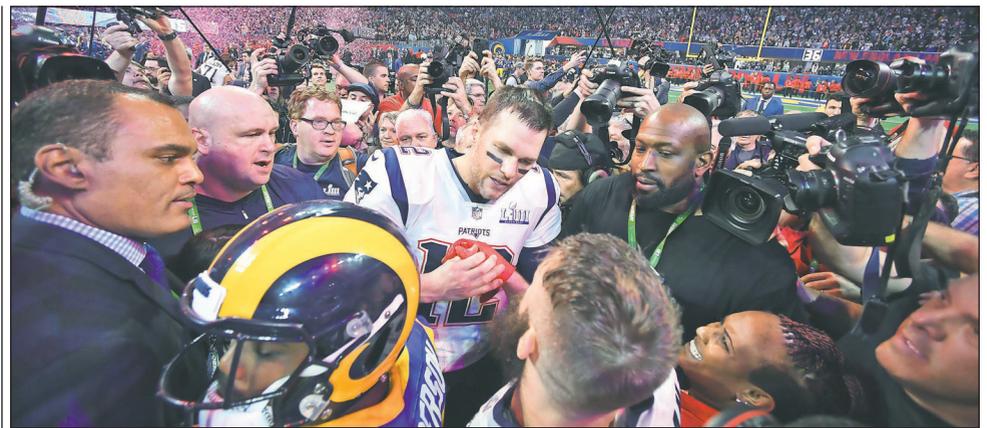
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With Tom Brady (12) at quarterback and coach Bill Belichick on the sidelines, the Patriots and their fans are well positioned to have more Super Bowl celebrations. PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

To be continued ...

Patriots are already setting up next season's run

BY BILL BURT
BBURT@EAGLETRIBUNE.COM

A poll conducted a few days before Super Bowl LIII found evidence of something most people already suspected: A majority of folks in the United States are sick of the New England Patriots.

We get it. Call it jealousy, call it hate, or maybe it's "Patriots fatigue." The University of Alabama's football program gets it too. The Crimson Tide competes for championships almost every year. They appear to be arrogant. And, maybe, people want something new.

This past January, America wanted Patrick Mahomes.

The Patriots, especially quarterback Tom Brady and coach Bill Belichick (he got hammered the worst), may be more despised than President Donald Trump is in Cambridge.

I hate to break the news to the football-watching public, but the Patriots and their six Super Bowl titles are not going anywhere. In fact, they might be even better in 2019.

First off, can we assume Brady will be very good

again next year? Of course we can.

Belichick and the Patriots will probably lose two or three starters from this year's squad including Rob Gronkowski (retirement), Trey Flowers (free agency) and Trent Brown (free agency).

Flowers is interesting because the Patriots could decide to assign him the defensive end franchise tag (roughly \$17 million) for a year, and the defense would still greatly improve. The Patriots will make additions, such as the return of injured middle linebacker Ja'Whan Bentley, who could prove to have been a steal as a fifth-round pick.

The Patriots will be well positioned when they walk into this April's NFL Draft.

Belichick has four picks in the first three rounds (one in the first, two in the second, one in the third). Overall they'll get a dozen picks.

That's a lot of decent-to-good talent coming to join a relatively young roster.

Bodies aside, Belichick and Brady are not relenting. Neither shows any sign of easing up.

Their quest for a record-breaking number of championships (their sixth

Super Bowl crown tied the Pittsburgh Steelers for most ever) and individual accomplishments is real. What they've already done probably will never be equaled.

But seven has a nice ring to it, and it would be a nice gift to Patriots owner Bob Kraft. It would make the team the winningest franchise in the Super Bowl era.

The 2018 Patriots not only got their mojo at the right time, the members of a young, mostly-signed team got another year of Super Bowl experience. Next season they'll play the NFC East, AFC North, Kansas City and Houston to go with their stampede through the AFC East.

Other than the Chiefs, could another team out there be a threat to possibly host the Patriots in yet another AFC Championship?

The bottom line: Even after another crazy Super Bowl, counting out the Patriots a huge mistake.

As far as America's opinion, well, that won't change any time soon either, especially when the next team is possibly as good, if not better, than this one.

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Super Bowl victory showed Belichick at his best

Bill Burt



With all due respect to Julian Edelman, the eventual award winner — and Kyle Van Noy, Dont'a Hightower, Stephon Gilmore and Sony Michel, four guys also deserving of the honor — there really was one only one MVP on the field under the roof of Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. He didn't touch the ball, deck the opposing quarterback or float a pass over a cornerback. He didn't rumble like a 6-foot-7 tight end. This MVP still did the best work of his career the night of Super Bowl LIII — and really for the entire year that preceded it. *Bill Belichick.* Anyone who knows a lick

about football knows it. They have to award the Super Bowl MVP to a player, and they chose a worthy one. Edelman came up big, like he always does, with 10 receptions and 141 yards.

Take a broader view of the game, however, and the high powered, well balanced, multidimensional Los Angeles Rams looked like the Buffalo Bills.

In the weeks before, the high-powered, well-balanced, multidimensional L.A. Chargers and Kansas City Chiefs (at least for one half) looked the N.Y. Jets.

All of which is attributable to Belichick.

The Patriots won Super Bowl LIII late on Feb. 3, 2019, 13-3, adding another chapter to the coach's already long legend. The fact that Belichick performed his best work, particularly on defense, against the "greatest young offensive mind" in football,

Rams coach Sean McVay, made this victory even sweeter.

The win delivered Belichick his sixth Lombardi Trophy as a coach — an all-time record — in 18 seasons. That's six titles in the modern era, tying the Pittsburgh Steelers, who did it over four decades and with three different head coaches.

Do you remember where Belichick was, professionally and personally, on his flight home from Minneapolis the first Monday morning in February of last year?

He was dead meat. He'd refused to play Malcolm Butler in the season's biggest game, and whether it mattered or not to the outcome, Belichick was blamed for the worst defensive performance in Super Bowl history in the 41-33 loss to Philadelphia.

For the next six months, the Patriots' coach and

general manager was a target. His quarterback, Tom Brady, dissed him on social media, as did a bevy of other current and former Patriots.

Then two players who have defined the second half of the Patriots Dynasty, Brady and Rob Gronkowski, were no-shows during the offseason.

A dinner meeting between Belichick and team owner Bob Kraft, which was caught on a blurry video on somebody's iPhone, was embarrassing.

Then came the 2018 season, with Brady turning 41 in August. The Patriots had no real wide receiver of note and no new players on defense worth talking about.

Yet, over the next five months, the Patriots methodically, albeit not always in a pretty fashion, ascended to the top.

And that's where the coach comes in. As of late-December, the

Patriots were as remarkable as any other Patriots Super Bowl champion.

Mind, there was a Miami Miracle and a bad loss in Pittsburgh, following suit from the early part of the season. The Patriots looked vulnerable.

No. No. And no. They are never vulnerable with Belichick and Brady.

While people may say Belichick has never won a Super Bowl without Brady, he sort of did on Feb. 3, with an average Brady.

Brady came through on one huge series, going 4-for-4 for 67 yards, and getting the ball to the 2-yard line on a perfect pass to Rob Gronkowski on the game-clinching drive. But this win was Belichick's baby.

Rams coach McVay — at 33 he's half Belichick's age — was out-coached and out-manuevered. The Rams offense, which he directs, went head to head with

Belichick's defense and left with three measly points and only 260 yards, its lowest total in two years.

How about measured against the past? Did Belichick do a better job than when he led the Giants defense against a much better Bills unit in the 1991 Super Bowl? Can we put any Patriots season and Super Bowl performance ahead of 2001 and an incredible playoff run against Oakland, Pittsburgh and the St. Louis Rams?

Who knows? I do know what's happened around this team the last six weeks, and especially on Super Bowl Sunday, puts the Most Valuable Person ahead of them all.

Belichick is the greatest in an era when just two championships would be enough to put most people in the discussion.

Super Bowl LIII was more proof.

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Belichick, Brady and the NFL's Mount Rushmore

By BILL BURT

A decade ago the comparisons were to Bill Walsh and Peyton Manning.

Then, a few years ago, the names thrown around were Vince Lombardi and Joe Montana.

Now, as of Feb. 4 of this year, there are no other names, at least not in the realm of pro football. There are no other faces carved on the NFL's Mount Rushmore.

What the coach and quarterback duo Bill Belichick and Tom Brady – who surprisingly aren't really good friends – have accomplished over 19 years together is unparalleled. The latest chapter in their achievement was written at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, where the Patriots defeated the Los Angeles Rams, 13-3, in Super Bowl LIII.

So many surprising things happened that night: Defense won a championship. Brady and Rob Gronkowski paired up like the old days. And another team was outmaneuvered by Belichick.

That's six Super Bowl championships -- the same as the Pittsburgh Steelers, which had a 4-0 lead before this all started in New England.

To put that into perspective, after joining the NFL in 1971, the Patriots needed 27 seasons to win six playoff games, and that included five wins over two Super Bowl runs. Those 55 years and older know what it's like when the cupboard is bare in Foxborough.

The fact that Belichick and Brady accomplished their many feats when the NFL became "Dynasty-proofed" before the turn



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo
Bill Belichick walks onto the field before the start of Super Bowl LIII.

of the century -- with lousy draft choices, harder schedules, salary caps and social media -- is even more amazing.

Franchises win and

disappear. It's simply expected. At least among 31 other NFL franchises.

Belichick had a private meeting with only six members of the media shortly after taking over football operations for the Patriots in January 2001. I'll never forget one thing he said that day: "I will never mortgage the future to win a championship."

Why didn't he sign some of your personal favorites -- people like Adam Vinatieri, Richard Seymour, Ty Law, Asante Samuel, Wes Welker, Aqib Talib, Deion Branch and Danny Amendola -- to new, expensive deals? Because they weren't worth it, at least in Belichick's eyes.

The coach pays for future performance, not past performance. His biggest move in his first job as a head coach in Cleveland was releasing a quarterback,

Bernie Kosar, who was a rare athlete who said he wanted to play for the Browns.

It was "heartless." It was also the right move. Kosar had a big contract at the time. He was a journeyman quarterback the rest of his career.

Brady has more than held up his end of this pairing. A rare breed himself, he drank the Belichick Kool-Aid, even when it might've been a little sour tasting the last 12 months. Belichick's magic elixir induces employees to choose winning over salary.

Look at Belichick's trusted assistants, including director of player personnel Nick Caserio, offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels and ex-defensive assistant Brian Flores, who left a day after Super Bowl LIII to take over the Miami Dolphins. All started

as "coffee delivery" boys and airport drivers for the team.

Running backs coach Ivan Fears has been here since 1991. Why is he still here?

"Because I love it here," said Fears. "I don't want to be any other place. This franchise is about winning. Isn't that what everybody wants?"

Apparently not.

Patriots owner Robert Kraft deserves his share of the credit too. He has given Belichick the resources and power to make all the calls without bureaucracy and channels of power. Kraft handed the keys to Belichick. The rest was history.

For nearly two decades, Belichick and Brady have figured it out. The only thing that matters is winning.

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10

reasons why the Patriots won No. 6

By BILL BURT

The New England Patriots not only beat the Los Angeles Rams, 13-3, in the lowest scoring Super Bowl ever. They crushed them. They never trailed. They owned the line of scrimmage. They made all of the big plays on offense and defense. Here we break down 10 reasons why the Patriots were the better team:

1. Couldn't cover Edelman

The Rams defense, including its defensive Wade Phillips, did an outstanding job keep the Patriots from blowing the game open. But the Patriots controlled the game, especially when it counted in the first half, and Julian Edelman was the Patriots' top weapon. The Rams took away the short passes to James White and long passes to Chris Hogan, but they had no answer for Edelman, who had 10 receptions for 141 yards en route to the MVP Award. They tried doubling him a few times, but it didn't work. He finished with eight first-down catches and had a catch for 13 yards on the

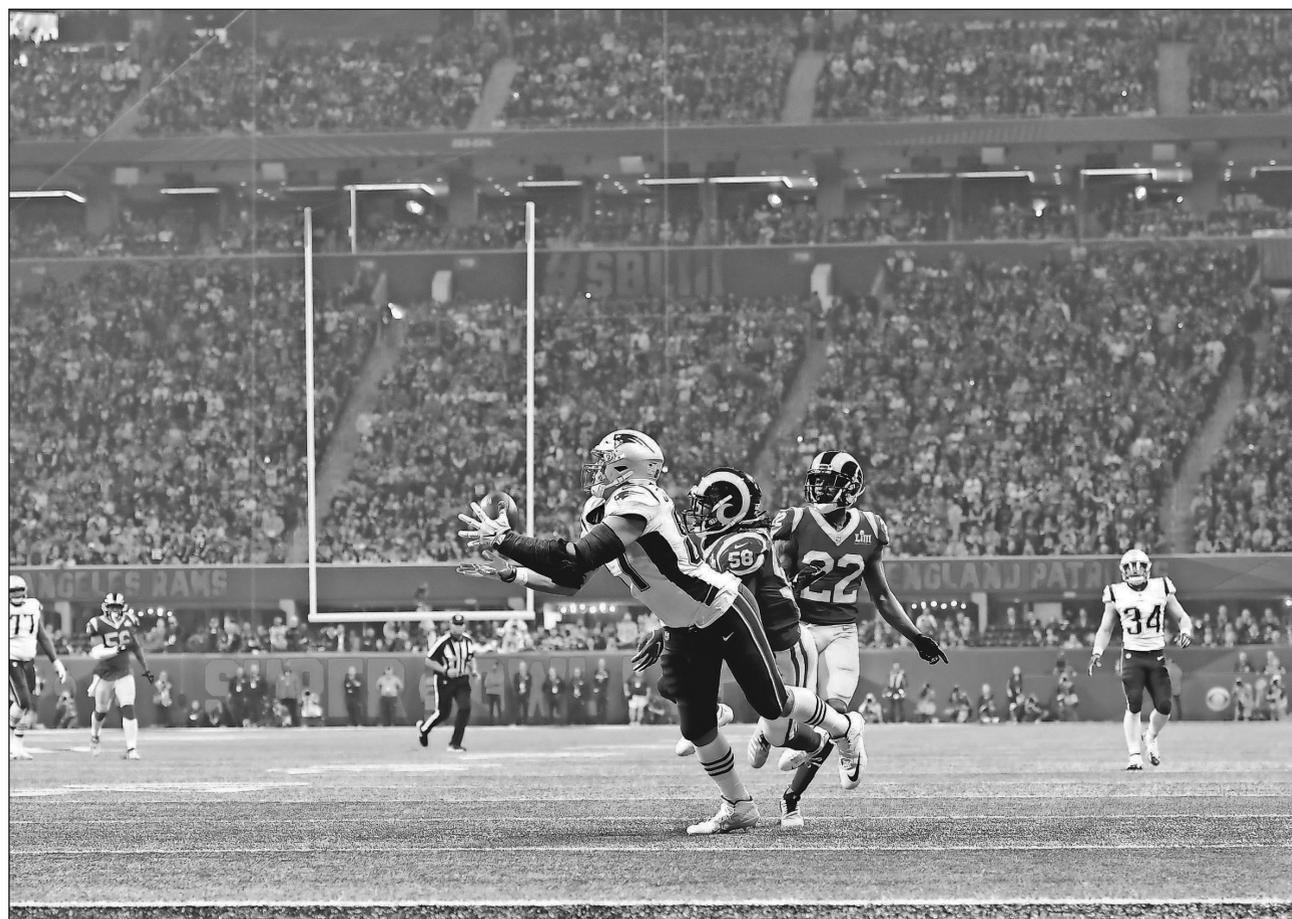
game-winning drive.

2. Field position

In last year's Super Bowl, the Patriots and Eagles combined for one punt. In Atlanta, there were 14 punts between the Pats and Rams. Why was that important? Three of the Patriots' five punts were downed inside the Rams' 10-yard line. With the Rams pinned down and having trouble moving the ball, it kept the Patriots offense near mid-field for most of the game. The Rams' average field position was the 17 yard line after those punts. "People don't like to talk field position. It's boring," said Patriots special teamer Matthew Slater, who downed two of those punts inside the 10. "To us, it's as important as anything. In tough, defensive games, you can win with field position."

3. Run, Sony, run

What a playoff run for Patriots rookie running back Sony Michel. In three games he rushed 71 times for 336 yards and six touchdowns. In the Super Bowl, it was 18 rushes for 96 yards and a touchdown.



Rob Gronkowski came up with two big catches – including this one near the goal line – to set up the only touchdown of Super Bowl LIII.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos



Rams head coach Sean McVay, right, and New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, left, greet each other on the field before the start of Super Bowl LIII at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

Bill Belichick's top themes as coach are consistency and production. Michel checked both boxes. He was a tough, inside runner who

was among the top running backs in yards after being hit. When he rushed for 60 or more yards, the Patriots were undefeated (9-0).

4. Gronk's big play

Rob Gronkowski admitted during Super Bowl week that injuries caught up to

him this season. But, like Michel, he played his best football in January. While his production wasn't like "old Gronk," he was huge at the end of the last two games, including receptions on the final scoring drives in Kansas City (AFC title) and Atlanta (Super Bowl). He was the No. 2 target for Brady against the Rams (6 receptions, 87 yards), one of which was the biggest play of the game, a 29-yard go-route to the 2-yard line.

5. The other McCourty

Jason McCourty made the biggest play of the game on defense, breaking up a sure-touchdown pass from Jared Goff to Brandin Cooks in the back of the end zone. It would have put the Rams ahead 7-3 late in the third quarter, but Jason made up 20 yards in no time and barely broke it up. When we talk about this Super Bowl, this might be the play that the Rams remember most.

Continued, Page 512



Patriots rookie running back Sony Michel (26), here dashing past the Rams' John Johnson III (43), rushed for 94 yards on 18 carries and scored the only touchdown in Super Bowl LIII.

■ Continued from Page S11

6. Blocking Donald

The Patriots have a history of shutting down great defensive linemen. Exhibit A is Houston Texans sensation J.J. Watt, who not only has never beaten the Patriots (0-7), he has only a half-sack against them. Aaron Donald, the reigning NFL Defensive Player of the Year, found himself double-teamed for most of the game. And he rarely got near Brady. He said going in that he needed to play well for the Rams to win. It never happened. In the Rams' four losses this year, Donald didn't have a sack.

7. Defense won championship

Bill Belichick went back to his roots — defense. Belichick cut his teeth winning ugly football games. The Patriots defense had the Rams uncomfortable for the entire game. Where have we seen this before? Maybe a few hundred times. How about the Super Bowl XXXVI win over the

Greatest Team on Turf, the St. Louis Rams, who got two late TDs in a 20-17 loss to the Patriots? In this year's AFC Championship, the Patriots shutout the Chiefs in the first half, the only time that had happened this season. Against the Rams, the Patriots allowed 260 total yards to a team that had averaged 421.1 for the season.

8. Patience on offense

When your defense is on its game and you know it, you can play close to the vest like the Patriots did against the Rams. The Patriots piled up a lot of yards (407) and never got frazzled or desperate despite it not being easy. The fact the Patriots were able to have so much balance (32 rushes, 33 passes) played into their "control." The Patriots finally had their moment when they needed to score, early in the fourth quarter, and they did.

9. Experience over inexperience

While the teams were like night and day when it came

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to Super Bowl experience, the chasm was more evident on the sidelines. Belichick, 66, simply overwhelmed Rams coach Sean McVay, 33. McVay, who also runs the offense, had no feel for what the Patriots were doing on defense. His quarterback was getting hit all game and all he could be seen doing was consoling Goff. Experience really isn't a big deal on the field. The team that plays the best wins. But it mattered with the coaches. In fact, McVay noted it afterward, to his credit.

10. Adjustments on winning drive

The difference between the Patriots and the Rams, or really most teams, is how the Patriots scored their only touchdown. Offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels was upset that "nothing" was working so they drew up plays as the fourth quarter began, with Brady by his side. After a first down pass to Gronkowski, the Patriots ran three straight plays from the same formation (Rex Burkhead wide left; Gronk inside of him; and Edelman motioning from right to the left side, inside of Gronk). Brady threw to each player — Edelman, Burkhead and Gronk — the last of whom got the ball to the 2 yard line. It was the flexibility of this team that allowed the only easy drive of the game.



Patriots defensive end Deatrich Wise (91) moves in on Los Angeles Rams quarterback Jared Goff.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

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Even early on, Belichick could see greatness in Julian Edelman

By MAC CERULLO

Jan. 10, 2010. It was arguably the low point of the Patriots' two-decade run of dominance.

After an up-and-down regular season, New England hosted the Baltimore Ravens in the AFC Wild Card round and got demolished. The Ravens led 24-0 by the end of the first quarter, and at no point in the 33-14 loss was there any reason to believe the Patriots had a shot at coming back.

But something happened that day, something few noticed at the time and few remember even to this day. Julian Edelman, then a 23-year-old rookie playing his first full season as a wide receiver, had perhaps the best game of his career to that point. The seventh-round pick, who had been playing quarterback at Kent State barely a year earlier, had six catches for 44 yards and New England's only two touchdowns on the day.

It was a performance that stuck with Bill Belichick, and one he came back to as Edelman was presented with the Super Bowl MVP award.

"He probably was our best player on the field,"



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

Julian Edelman (11) dashes downfield during the third quarter of Super Bowl LIII at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

Belichick said. "Now, we didn't play well that day, and we got hammered, but he played that game the way he played the Ohio State game when he was at Kent State. Catching a slip screen on fourth-and-10 and breaking five tackles to get the first down."

As it turned out, that performance was a sign of things to come.

Over the past decade, Edelman has been

responsible for many of the defining plays of the late-era Patriots dynasty, and he's been a crucial piece in helping New England capture three Super Bowl titles in the last five years.

In 2014, Edelman helped lead New England's improbable comeback over the Ravens by hitting Danny Amendola for a 51-yard touchdown pass, and in the Super Bowl he shook off a massive hit from Kam

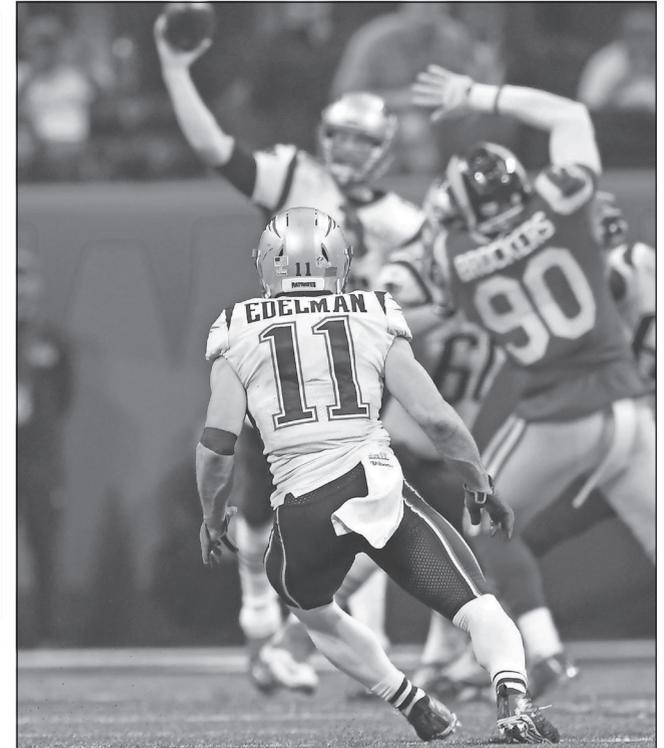
Chancellor to convert a must-have, third-and-13 play before beating Tharold Simon for the game-winning touchdown shortly after.

Two years later, Edelman made arguably the greatest catch in NFL history, snatching a tipped ball inches from the ground between several defenders' legs late in Super Bowl LI to set up the game-tying touchdown and the eventual overtime victory.

He missed all of last year with a torn ACL, and then a four-game suspension for performance enhancing drug use sidelined him for the first month of this season. At age 32, there was good reason to wonder if Edelman would ever be the same player again.

But Edelman put those worries to rest quickly, matching the per-game production of his best seasons while re-establishing himself as Tom Brady's most trusted receiver.

Then, when the postseason began, Edelman took



Tom Brady often looked to Julian Edelman for key yardage in Super Bowl LIII.

his game to new heights once more.

In the Patriots' three play-off games, Edelman made 26 catches for 388 yards. That included several key third-down conversions late in the AFC Championship win over the Kansas City Chiefs, and then in Super Bowl LIII, he personally outgained the Rams 93-57 in the first half. He kept the offense moving even when everyone else struggled, and he earned Super Bowl MVP honors after finishing with 10 catches for 141 yards in the 13-3 win.

"I'm just so proud of him," Tom Brady said of his close friend after the game. "He's been an incredible player for this team in the playoffs and he just cemented himself, again, in the history of the NFL for what his accomplishments are."

"It's an incredible story,"

Belichick said Monday. "Coming back from the injury last year, you just see Julian in there every day competing against himself, trying to get better, trying to continue to rehab and regain the excellence at his position that he has come to do."

Once a converted quarterback with no clear future in the league, Edelman may now earn Hall of Fame consideration when all is said and done. With 115 catches for 1,412 yards in 18 post-season games, he has a post-season resume surpassed only by Jerry Rice. He's one of the few players in league history who can say they were an essential piece of one of the league's greatest dynasties.

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BROTHERS OF DESTRUCTION

How Hightower and Van Noy dominated defensive effort

BY MAC CERULLO

Julian Edelman was named Super Bowl MVP, and he was deserving of the honor. But anyone who watched Super Bowl LIII could see the true Most Valuable Player for the Patriots was the defense.

Disrespected and dismissed early in the season, the Patriots put forth a championship effort, holding the high-powered Los Angeles Rams to three points. The win reflected a complete team effort, with everyone from the front seven to secondary doing their jobs to stymie the Rams and keep third-year quarterback Jared Goff on his toes.

But while no one player stood out, a strong case could be made for linebackers Dont'a Hightower and Kyle Van Noy as Super Bowl MVPs.

All game long, Hightower and Van Noy terrorized Goff while causing havoc in the Rams backfield. The two spent much of the game at or near the line of scrimmage. On a combined 45 pass-rush snaps, the two totaled six tackles, three sacks, six quarterback hits and nine pressures.



Dont'a Hightower celebrates after sacking Los Angeles Rams quarterback Jared Goff during the fourth quarter of Super Bowl LIII.

Many of those plays came in key spots. Van Noy's sack came after running down Goff on third-and-2 near midfield late in the second quarter, and Hightower's first came on the very next offensive snap for the Rams on the subsequent drive.

Those plays combined to help ensure Los Angeles didn't score prior to halftime.

Hightower in particular was a menace to start the second half. Coming out of the break, he nearly intercepted Goff's first pass of

the half, and on the next possession he hurried Goff into a bad throw while nearly picking up a safety on a third-and-6 play deep in LA territory to force a punt. The next series out, the Rams were putting together

Continued, Page S17



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

Patriots linebacker Kyle Van Noy (53) reacts after sacking Los Angeles Rams quarterback Jared Goff during the second quarter of Super Bowl LIII.

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PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

Patriots linebackers Kyle Van Noy (53) and Dont'a Hightower (54) celebrate after a play in the third quarter.

■ Continued from Page S15

their best drive of the game, but then on third and 7, Hightower smoked Rams guard Austin Blythe and got to Goff untouched for his second sack.

That turned a great red zone opportunity into a 53-yard field goal attempt for Greg Zuerlein.

Finally, with the Patriots defending a 10-3 lead and the Rams driving for a tie, Van Noy rocked Goff as he threw, forcing a second down incompleteness. Then, on the decisive interception to Stephon Gilmore, Hightower was among a pack of Patriots barreling into the backfield, prompting Goff to chuck up a prayer.

"He's a dog and I try to be a dog. We're elite football players. We believe it," Van Noy said after the game. "We have teammates that are elite, and we all on point. We communicated well, and we executed the game plan at an amazing level."

Hightower's and Van Noy's Super Bowl heroics



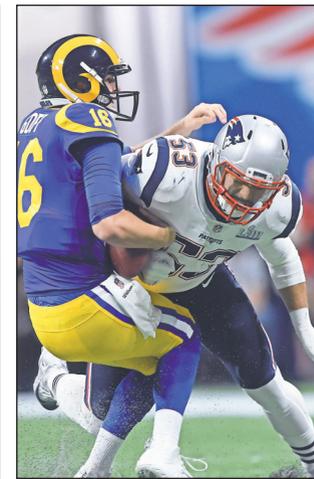
Dont'a Hightower (54), left, tries to play through a line of Los Angeles Rams including Mark Barron (26) and John Johnson III (43) right.

were nothing new. According to Pro Football Focus, the pair rushed the passer 120 times and logged 27 pressures in New England's three post-season games.

During the regular season, no linebacker duo was more prolific in rushing the quarterback, with Van Noy leading all off-ball linebackers with 275 pass-rush snaps while Hightower was

third in the league with 197.

After spending an entire season listening to doubts about whether the Patriots had the talent or ability on defense to win a championship, neither Hightower nor Van Noy were shy about letting all of their doubters know they were wrong. But while neither went so far as saying one of them should have been



Kyle Van Noy (53) sacks Rams quarterback Jared Goff.

MVP, Van Noy gave his fellow linebacker a shoutout, pointing to him from across the room at the podium and praising him for his performance.

"I love that man. He's like my brother. We've been doing it for the last three and a half years together, and I'd go out there with him anytime," Van Noy said. "We'll run games at any point, we're always ready."



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New England Patriots defensive back Jason McCourty (30) leaps to knock away a possible touchdown pass to Los Angeles Rams wide receiver Brandin Cooks during the third quarter of Super Bowl LIII. It was one of the signature plays of the game.

PAUL BILODEAU/
Staff photo



The other McCourty

Twin brought excitement, exuberance, big plays to championship season

BY BILL BURT

Jason McCourty looks exactly like his identical twin and New England Patriots lifer, Devin.

But, in some respects, the two didn't seem related — at least when it comes to winning football games.

In nine previous seasons (eight with Titans, one with Browns), Jason not only never won a division title, he never played a playoff game.

And, for the past eight months he acted like it.

Jason acted like a kid in a candy store, or at least a kid planning a trip to a candy store. His exuberance was everywhere.

"I can't help it," he said.

"From the first day I got here, I knew it was different. I knew we had a chance to do something special. Remember, my brother is my best friend, and I talk to him every day."

The "other" McCourty, whom the Patriots picked up from Cleveland for a draft pick almost a year ago, was a breath of fresh air in a season that, at times, was dull, disjointed, imprecise.

AFC East titles don't mean much around here, at least not right now. Neither do berths in the AFC Championship or actual conference championships.

Jason McCourty was having none of it.

He went skipping off the field after receiving his AFC

East Divisional championship T-shirt and hat, as if he was going to tell his mom something special.

"You know a lot of guys in this locker room experience different things," he said. "You know, for (Devin), he has won his division every year ... not that he takes it for granted, but he goes into every season with that expectation.

"Other years we strive for that, but I cannot go as far to say it was expected," he added. "I think every step you take moving forward, and any type of success you have, you just want to cherish it for a second before you move on. Especially for me, 10 years, you know how hard that journey is. Being

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McCourty and Cooks crash to the ground after McCourty knocked the ball out of Cooks' hands.

so close sometimes, letting it slip through your fingers, so I will enjoy the rest of today then get ready for

playing the New York Jets." His appreciation is refreshing, isn't it? Devin enjoyed the ride

with his twin. "I'm ecstatic, man," said Devin after the divisional win. "We've been telling

him for three weeks now that we're going to get him a hat and T-shirt." Even better, just over a

month later, Jason got to hold the Lombardi Trophy on the Mercedes-Benz Stadium field.

In the locker room after the Super Bowl, owner Robert Kraft made it a point to congratulate him and remind him that he had a bigger role in winning the Super Bowl than he probably realized.

"You showing that excitement gave perspective to the guys and everyone else," said Kraft. "Seeing your spontaneity and happiness helped the whole locker room. So, people appreciate it."

But Jason offered more than happiness. He offered big plays, none bigger than his breakup of an apparent touchdown pass to Brandin Cooks in the back of the end zone in Super Bowl LIII.

Jason was about 20 yards from the play when he realized Cooks was alone. He was in the right side of the end zone, with nobody in his area, when he sprinted toward Cooks,

who was just in front of the uprights. Jason hit Cooks' arm just as the ball arrived, sending it sailing away and Cooks to the turf.

"It was the play of the game," said Devin, who was the closest Patriot to the play. "I am so proud of him. He had a great year and even better playoffs."

In fact, the Patriots started their upward trend in a win over the Bills on Dec. 23. Jason had a great interception that day, snaring the ball high above his head and barely scraping both feet inbounds.

A bigger play was the fumble he forced on the Patriots' 6-yard line, ripping the ball from Bills tight end Jason Croom's grasp, killing the last bit of momentum for the Bills, who trailed only 21-6 at the time.

"This has been a dream come true for me," said Jason. "It's a season I'll never forget ... Honestly, I sensed this was a special place when I came to (off-season workouts) in April."



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SUPER BOWL LIII STATISTICS

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Mercedes Benz Stadium, Atlanta, Georgia
Box Score

	1	2	3	4	F
New England	0	3	0	10	13
L.A. Rams	0	0	3	0	3

Attendance: 70,081



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

LaAdrian Waddle (68) and kicker Stephen Gostkowski celebrate at the end of Super Bowl LIII.

Scoring
Second Quarter: NE - FG Gostkowski 42 yard, 10:29. Drive: 7 plays, 39 yards, 3:29. Key plays: Brady 25-yard pass to Edelman on 3rd-and-1; Brady 4-yard pass to Gronkowski on 3rd-and-9; New England 3, L.A. Rams 0.

Third Quarter: LAR - FG Zuerlein 53 yard, 2:11. Drive: 10 plays, 42 yards, 4:22. Key plays: Goff 15-yard pass to Cooks; Goff 18-yard pass to Woods on 3rd-and-6. New England 3, L.A. Rams 3.

Fourth Quarter: NE - TD Michel, 2-yard run (Gostkowski PAT), 7:00. Drive: 5 plays, 69 yards, 2:49. Key plays: Brady 18-yard pass to Gronkowski; Brady 13-yard pass to Edelman; Brady 29-yard pass to Gronkowski. New England 10, L.A. Rams 3.

Fourth Quarter: NE - FG Gostkowski 41 yard, 1:12. Drive: 9 plays, 72 yards, 3:05. Key Plays: Michel 26-yard run; Burkhead 26-yard run. New England 13, L.A. Rams 3.

Team Stats

NE	LAR	
First Downs	22	14
Rushing	6	2
Passing	12	11
Penalty	4	1
Third Down Eff.	3-12	3-13
Fourth Down Eff.	0-1	0-0
Total Net Yards	407	260
Total Plays	68	60
Avg Gain	6.0	4.3
Net Yards Rushing	154	62
Rushes	32	18
Avg Per Rush	4.8	3.4
Net Yards Passing	253	198
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-9	4-31
Gross-Yards Passing	262	229
Completed-Att.	21-35	19-38
Had Intercepted	1	1
Yards-Pass Play	7.0	4.7
Kickoffs-Endzone-Tb	4-3-3	2-1-1
Punts-Avg	5-43.0	9-46.3
Punts Blocked	0	0

Fgs-Pats Blocked	0-0	0-0
Total Return Yardage	40	39
Punt Returns	2-2	2-12
Kickoff Returns	1-38	1-27
Interceptions	1-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	3-20	9-65
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Time Of Possession	33:10	26:50

Individual stats

RUSHING New England, Michel 18-94, Burkhead 7-43, Edelman 1-8, Patterson 2-7, White 2-4, Brady 2-(minus 2). L.A. Rams, Gurley 10-35, Anderson 7-22, Woods 1-5.

PASSING New England, Brady 21-35-1-262. L.A. Rams, Goff 19-38-1-229.

RECEIVING New England, Edelman 10-141, Gronkowski 6-87, Burkhead 2-15, Patterson 2-14, White 1-5. L.A. Rams, Cooks 8-120, Woods 5-70, Reynolds 3-28, Anderson 2-12, Gurley 1-(minus 1).

PUNT RETURNS New England, Edelman 2-2. L.A. Rams, Natson 2-12.

KICKOFF RETURNS New England, Patterson 1-38. L.A. Rams, Natson 1-27.

TACKLES-ASSISTS-SACKS New England, Jones 6-2-1, Gilmore 5-0-0, McCourty 4-1-0, Wise 3-2-0, Van Noy 3-0-1, Flowers 2-1-0, Hightower 2-0-2, Guy 2-0-0, Shelton 2-0-0, Chung 1-2-0, Jackson 1-1-0, McCourty 1-1-0, Roberts 1-0-0, McClellan 1-0-0, Brown 0-2-0. L.A. Rams, Littleton 6-4-0, Peters 5-2-0, Brockers 5-2-0, Johnson 5-2-0, Joyner 4-2-0, Talib 4-0-0, Fowler 4-0-0, Barron 3-5-0, Ebukam 3-0-0, Donald 1-4-0, Robey-Coleman 1-1-0, Suh 1-1-0, Franklin-Myers 1-0-1.

INTERCEPTIONS New England, Gilmore 1-0. L.A. Rams, Littleton 1-0.

MISSED FIELD GOALS New England, Gostkowski 46. L.A. Rams, Zuerlein 48.

Officials

Referee John Parry, Ump Fred Bryan, HL Ed Camp, LJ Jeff Bergman, FJ Steve Zimmer, SJ Eugene Hall, BJ Terrence Miles, Replay Jim Lapetina.

SUPER BOWL RECORDS



SUPER BOWL RECORDS SET IN SUPER BOWL LIII

- ▶ Most Super Bowl Games Played (9) Tom Brady
- ▶ Most Super Bowl Games Played on Winning Team (6) Tom Brady
- ▶ Oldest Starting QB on a Winning Team (41) Tom Brady
- ▶ Most Super Bowl Games by a Head Coach (9) Bill Belichick
- ▶ Most Super Bowl Games on a Winning Team by a Head Coach (6) Bill Belichick
- ▶ Oldest Head Coach, Winning Team (66) Bill Belichick
- ▶ Most Passes, Career Super Bowl Appearances (392) Tom Brady
- ▶ Most Completions, Career Super Bowl Appearances (256) Tom Brady
- ▶ Most Passing Yards, Career Appearances (2,838) Tom Brady
- ▶ Longest Punt (65 yards) Johnny Hekker
- ▶ Most Super Bowl Games Played by a Team (11) New England

- ▶ Fewest Points in a Super Bowl, by Both Teams (16) New England (13) vs. L.A. Rams (3)
- ▶ Fewest Points in a Super Bowl, scored by the winning team (13) New England
- ▶ Fewest Points by Both Teams, through Three Quarters (6) New England (3) vs. L.A. Rams (3)
- ▶ Fewest Touchdowns per Game by Both Teams (1) New England (1) vs. L.A. Rams (0)
- ▶ Fewest PATs per Game, by Both Teams (1) New England (1) vs. L.A. Rams (0)
- ▶ Fewest Kickoff Returns per Game, by Both Teams (2) New England (1) vs. L.A. Rams (1)

- ▶ Most Consecutive Drives Ending With A Punt, per Game, by Either Team (8) L.A. Rams

SUPER BOWL RECORDS TIED IN SUPER BOWL LIII

- ▶ Most Super Bowl Field Goals in a Career (7) Stephen Gostkowski
- ▶ Most Receptions in a First Half (7) Julian Edelman
- ▶ Most Punt Returns, Career (8) Julian Edelman
- ▶ Most Games Won by a Team (6) New England
- ▶ Fewest Points Scored in a Game, by a Team (3) L.A. Rams
- ▶ Fewest Touchdowns in a Game, by a Team (0) L.A. Rams
- ▶ Most First Downs By Penalty, in a Game, Team (4) New England
- ▶ Fewest Touchdowns, Passing, Game, Both Teams (0) New England vs. L.A. Rams
- ▶ Fewest Fumbles Lost, Game, Both Teams (0) New England vs. L.A. Rams

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The road to the championship

How the Patriots won their third Super Bowl in five years

By MAC CERULLO

GAME 1 Houston at New England Sunday, Sept. 9, 2018 Patriots 27, Texans 20

The skinny: After a turbulent off-season in which Tom Brady and Rob Gronkowski both skipped the team's voluntary workouts, the Patriots looked just like their old selves in a decisive season-opening win. Brady threw for 277 yards and three touchdowns, while the Texans' offense struggled as quarterback Deshaun Watson appeared rusty coming off an ACL injury that cut his first season as a starter short.

Key play: The tone was set early after Brady hit Gronkowski for a vintage 21-yard touchdown on the first drive of the game.

Quote: "I'm just glad to be here, glad to be part of this team, glad to be part of this organization," Gronkowski said after the game.

GAME 2 New England at Jacksonville Sunday, Sept. 16, 2018 Jaguars 31, Patriots 20

The skinny: In a rematch of last year's AFC Championship Game, the Jacksonville Jaguars outlasted the Patriots in a punishing heat approaching 100 degrees at field level. Jaguars quarterback Blake Bortles had the best game of his career, throwing four touchdown passes — including three in the first half — while victimizing the Patriots with several key first-down rushes to extend drives.

Key play: Bortles' last touchdown was a 61-yarder to Dede Westbrook in the fourth quarter, which put the Jaguars ahead 31-13 and effectively sealed the win.

Quote: "We feel like if we're at the top of our game, we can't be beat," said All-Pro Jaguars cornerback Jalen Ramsey, whose team would go on to lose eight of its next nine games.

GAME 3 New England at Detroit Sunday, Sept. 23, 2018



Associated Press

Patriots defensive tackle Lawrence Guy, right, and defensive end Trey Flowers (98) pressure Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen (17) in the end zone Dec. 23.

Patriots safety Patrick Chung (23) and defensive lineman Trey Flowers (98) celebrate their sack of Indianapolis Colts quarterback Andrew Luck (12).

David Le photo



Lions 26, Patriots 10

The skinny: Facing former defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, the Patriots suffered one of their worst defeats in years, managing only 209 yards of total offense while going 2 for 9 on third down conversions. Tom Brady went 14 for 26 with a touchdown and an interception while getting sacked twice, and no Patriots skill position player managed better than 51 yards.

Key play: After cutting the deficit to three points on a 10-yard touchdown pass to James White in the third quarter, the Patriots surrendered a 33-yard touchdown pass from Matthew Stafford to Marvin Jones Jr. to fall behind by two scores again.

The Lions would tack on two field goals in the fourth quarter to pull away.

Quote: "I'm sure it meant a lot, his first win as head coach," said Stafford when asked about Patricia. "Probably no sweeter than to do it against your old team."

GAME 4 Miami at New England Sunday, Sept. 30, 2018 Patriots 38, Dolphins 7

The skinny: Coming in at 1-2 while the Miami Dolphins were 3-0, there was concern that another loss could spell real trouble for the Patriots in the short and long term. Those



JAIME CAMPOS/Staff photo

Cordarrelle Patterson blows past T.J. McDonald of the Dolphins.



Phillip Dorsett (13) catches a touchdown pass during the first half of the Divisional AFC playoff game against the Chargers.

PAUL BILODEAU/
Staff photo

doubts were quickly erased, however, after the Patriots dominated the Dolphins for one of the most lopsided wins of the season. Rookie running back Sony Michel rushed for 112 yards and a touchdown, Brady threw for 274 yards and three touchdowns, and James White had 112 yards from scrimmage and two total touchdowns. Meanwhile, the defense held the Dolphins to just 172 yards of total offense.

Key play: Phillip Dorsett caught a 9-yard touchdown pass from Tom Brady with 0:18 seconds left before halftime, putting the Patriots ahead 24-0 at the break. The Patriots would eventually make it 38-0 before

the Dolphins finally scored a late touchdown with 2:42 to go.

Quote: "We hadn't played well in the last weeks," Brady said. "This game's great. But you've got to turn the page."

GAME 5 Indianapolis at New England Thursday, Oct. 4, 2018 Patriots 38, Colts 24

The skinny: Having missed the first four games of the season due to a PED suspension, Julian Edelman returned for his first game since Super Bowl LI against Atlanta. The veteran receiver made seven catches for 57 yards, and Tom

Brady also threw his 500th career touchdown pass, hitting newly acquired receiver Josh Gordon for a 34-yard TD pass in the fourth quarter.

Key play: Brady's historic touchdown pass to Gordon came after the Colts scored two second half touchdowns to turn a 24-3 halftime deficit into a far more competitive 24-17 game. Gordon's score pushed the lead back to two touchdowns and Sony Michel's 34-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter put the game away.

Quote: "During the rehab you are just sitting there and waiting to get back on the field," Edelman said. "It felt great to be out there with the guys."

GAME 6 Kansas City at New England Sunday, Oct. 14, 2018 Patriots 43, Chiefs 40

The skinny: One of the most highly anticipated games of the season lived up to the hype. The Patriots took a 24-9 halftime lead over the Chiefs, but second-year sensation Patrick Mahomes led the Chiefs back with a monster second half. The Chiefs took the lead midway through the fourth quarter and tied it again with 3:03 to play, but the Patriots were able to win on a last-second 28-yard field goal by Stephen Gostkowski.

Key play: Just prior to Gostkowski's winning kick, Tom Brady found Rob Gronkowski for a 39-yard completion, setting up the relatively easy kick for the win.

Quote: "It's tough to slow these guys down, they've been scoring a lot of points all year," Brady said. "They're going to be pretty tough to stop. Glad we had our last shot and glad we took advantage of it."

GAME 7 New England at Chicago Sunday, Oct. 21, 2018 Patriots 38, Bears 31

The skinny: Cordarrelle Patterson had a 95-yard kickoff return touchdown and Kyle Van Noy became the first Patriots' player in 22 years to return a blocked punt for a touchdown, but it was nearly all for naught as the

Continued, Page S24

Chicago Bears nearly converted a Hail Mary pass to tie the game and force overtime. Tom Brady went 25 for 36 with 277 yards and three touchdowns, and Josh Gordon had four catches for 100 yards.

Key play: On the final play of the game, Bears quarterback Mitchell Trubisky threw up a 54-yard prayer toward the end zone, and receiver Kyle White was able to haul it down. However, White was just short of the end zone, and the Patriots were able to keep him out as time expired.

Quote: "You hold your breath when I saw him jump up and catch it," Brady said. "They were pushing and we were pushing. It was probably a half yard or a yard, pretty close. Good for us to hold them out."

**GAME 8
 New England at Buffalo
 Monday, Oct. 29, 2018
 Patriots 25, Bills 6**

The skinny: The first Monday Night Football game in Buffalo in nearly a decade wasn't pretty at times, but Patriots safety Devin McCourty was able to run back an 84-yard interception for a touchdown to cap off a dominant effort by the defense. Julian Edelman and James White combined for 19 catches, and with Sony Michel recovering from a knee injury, Cordarrelle Patterson stepped in as the lead running back, rushing for 38 yards on 10 carries.

Key play: During Devin McCourty's 84-yard interception return, the veteran safety reached 22.5 miles per hour, which was the fastest any ball carrier had run up to that point this season, according to the NFL's Next Gen Stats.

Quote: "I felt like once our offense got one in the end zone, it was big for us to go out there and try to get a stop," McCourty said. "And it ended up being a turnover for a touchdown."

**GAME 9
 Green Bay at
 New England
 Sunday, Nov. 4, 2018
 Patriots 31, Packers 17**

The skinny: A highly anticipated matchup of future Hall of Fame quarterbacks went decisively in Tom Brady's favor, as the Patriots pulled away in the fourth quarter for the team's sixth straight win. Brady had 294 yards passing and a touchdown, including a 55-yard touchdown pass to Josh Gordon in the fourth quarter to put the game away, while Aaron Rodgers had 259 yards and two touchdowns.

Key play: With the game tied at

17-17 entering the fourth quarter, Brady found Phillip Dorsett for a 17-yard gain on 3rd and 7, helping extend a drive that would eventually end with the go-ahead 1-yard touchdown by James White.

Quote: "We made some plays in the fourth quarter when we needed to," Brady said. "Anytime you beat a good football team it feels good. So, 7-2 is a long ways from 1-2 where we were."

**GAME 10
 New England at
 Tennessee
 Sunday, Nov. 11, 2018
 Titans 34, Patriots 10**

The skinny: Another highly anticipated matchup with a former Patriots legend turned into another dud of a performance for New England, as the Patriots were dismantled on the road by Mike Vrabel's Tennessee Titans. The Patriots went 3 for 15 on third down conversions, allowed 150 yards rushing and were trailing by two touchdowns by the end of the first quarter.

Key play: After surrendering two long touchdown drives to start the game, the Patriots took the ball and proceeded to go three and out. Tom Brady was sacked for an 11-yard loss on third down, and on the ensuing drive the Titans picked up a field goal to extend the lead to 17-3.

Quote: "Those players, just like me, and Dean (Peets), and everybody else that spent time there, we learned a lot from the people there, from Mr. (Robert) Kraft down to Bill (Belichick) and his staff," said Vrabel, a former Patriots linebacker and one of many ex-Patriots in the Titans organization. "We're together here with the Titans. We're really proud to be a part of this organization."

**GAME 11
 New England
 at New York Jets
 Sunday, Nov. 25, 2018
 Patriots 27, Jets 13**

The skinny: Back to full strength following his knee injury against Chicago, Sony Michel rushed for a career-high 133 yards and a touchdown to lead the Patriots to a bounce-back road win over the New York Jets coming out of the bye week. Rob Gronkowski caught his first touchdown pass since Week 1, a 34-yard grab down the middle, and the Patriots defense held the Jets to just three points after halftime.

Key play: Tied at 13-13 in the third quarter, Tom Brady hit Julian Edelman for a 21-yard touchdown pass to give the

Patriots the lead for good.

Quote: "When he's out there, it's great for our offense," Brady said of Gronkowski getting back in the end zone. "I don't want to minimize anything he does."

**GAME 12
 Minnesota at New
 England
 Sunday, Dec. 2, 2018
 Patriots 24, Vikings 10**

The skinny: With the game tied at 10-10 late in the third quarter, the Patriots got a quick four-play scoring drive to take the lead, capping off the 75-yard drive with a 24-yard touchdown pass to Josh Gordon to take the lead. The Patriots also nearly shut out All-Pro Vikings receiver Adam Thielen, who was held to five catches for 28 yards and a touchdown, and with the win Bill Belichick earned his 250th career victory, including the postseason.

Key play: After the Vikings tied the game on a Dan Bailey field goal, Tom Brady hit Gordon for a 24-yard completion, found Rob Gronkowski for 15 yards, hit James White for 12 yards and finally got Gordon for 24 again for the touchdown.

Quote: "Obviously we've got to get better. I've got to get better," Thielen said. "I didn't make the plays I needed to."

**GAME 13
 New England at Miami
 Sunday, Dec. 9, 2018
 Dolphins 34, Patriots 33**

The skinny: A strange, back and forth game came to an unforgettable conclusion, as the Patriots fell victim to the "Miami Miracle" on the final play of the game. Leading by five with 0:16 left, the Patriots allowed a 69-yard touchdown to Kenyan Drake, who made the catch about 12 yards down field and then weaved his way through New England's prevent defense. The last two he beat were J.C. Jackson and Rob Gronkowski, who was on the field to prevent a throw to the end zone but couldn't keep up with the speedy running back.

Key play: While the Miami Miracle is the play everyone was talking about at the end, it was only possible thanks to a number of mistakes on the Patriots' part beforehand. Stephen Gostkowski missed a field goal and an extra point, Tom Brady mismanaged the clock before halftime, costing his team a scoring chance. The Patriots couldn't punch in the game-clinching touchdown from the Miami goal line on its final possession, settling for the field goal and leaving the door open for the Dolphins at the end.

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New England Patriots tight ends, including Rob Gronkowski, dance and celebrate during the team's



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Victory parade.



Patriots quarterback Tom Brady hoists one of the team's six Lombardi trophies in the air.



Head coach Bill Belichick waves to fans.



A young fan lights up as she sees New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady approach on a duck boat.



New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft holds one of the team's six Lombardi trophies while yelling "Let's Go" to fans.

Continued from Page S24

Quote: "Football is a crazy game," Brady said.

GAME 14 New England at Pittsburgh

Sunday, Dec. 16, 2018
Steelers 17, Patriots 10

The skinny: The Patriots surrendered 142 yards rushing to Steelers rookie running back Jaylen Samuels, and offensively the team couldn't sustain any drives as New England lost its second straight in the month of December. The Patriots had two opportunities to either tie or take the lead in the fourth quarter, but the first opportunity ended with a Tom Brady interception in the end zone, while the second ended with a turn-over on downs following a fourth down incompleteness to Julian Edelman.

Key play: After Brady found Rob Gronkowski for a first down to set up first and goal from the five, Marcus Cannon was called for offsides, moving the Patriots back to the 15. Two plays later, Brady was intercepted by Steelers cornerback Joe Haden while trying to throw the ball out of bounds.

Quote: "We haven't played very well on the road," Brady said. "Obviously what we're doing isn't good enough."

GAME 15 Buffalo at New England

Sunday, Dec. 23, 2018
Patriots 24, Bills 12

The skinny: Coming off two straight losses, the Patriots finally righted the ship and clinched the team's 10th consecutive AFC East title with a decisive win over the Buffalo Bills. Sony Michel rushed for 116 yards and a touchdown, helping lift the offense despite a subpar day for Tom Brady and the passing offense.

Key play: Leading 14-6 but facing fourth and 4 on the Bills 32, Brady found Julian Edelman on a quick slant to pick up the first down. When Edelman was tackled, he rolled over his defender and never actually touched the ground. As a result, he kept running and was able to pick up the backbreaking 32-yard touchdown.

Quote: "We didn't have our best day in the passing game, but it felt good to win," Brady said.

GAME 16 New York Jets at New England

Sunday, Dec. 30, 2018
Patriots 38, Jets 3

The skinny: Needing a win to

lock up a first-round bye in the playoffs, the Patriots left no room for doubt as the team put together its most complete win of the season. Tom Brady threw for 250 yards and four touchdowns, and seven different receivers made catches, including four different players for touchdowns.

Key play: Early in the third quarter, Adam Butler got to Jets quarterback Sam Darnold on third and 10 and forced a fumble on the strip sack. Kyle Van Noy scooped up the ball and took it 46 yards for the touchdown to make it 28-3.

Quote: "Essentially, we won next week because we won today," said coach Bill Belichick. "We'll see who our next opponent is, but we know they'll be good or they wouldn't be playing this time of year."

AFC Divisional playoff

GAME 17: Los Angeles Chargers at New England

Sunday, Jan. 13, 2019
Patriots 41, Chargers 28

The skinny: What was expected to be a highly competitive AFC Divisional Playoff game quickly turned into a rout, as the Patriots rolled over the Chargers 41-28 in a game that was far more lopsided than the final score would suggest. Sony Michel rushed for 129 yards and three touchdowns, and the Patriots scored 28 unanswered points to close the first half and go into halftime leading 35-7.

Key play: Leading 28-7, the Patriots offense finally appeared to hit a wall when the Chargers forced a three and out. But then, Chargers' punt returner Desmond King muffed the punt, which was barely recovered in bounds by Patriots special teamer Albert McClellan. Four plays later, Michel was in the end zone for his third touchdown.

Quote: "You've got to play your best football at this time of year," said running back James White. "I just try and put my best foot forward, have no regrets, study my opponent as best as possible and just try to put my best performance out there every time I step out there."

AFC Championship

GAME 18 New England at Kansas City

Sunday, Jan. 20, 2019
Patriots 37, Chiefs 31 (OT)

The skinny: A highly anticipated rematch of the AFC's



Patriots running back James White (28) scores a touchdown ahead of Buffalo Bills strong safety Micah Hyde (23) in December.

Associated Press



Patriots offensive lineman Joe Thuney celebrates a touchdown during Monday Night Football against the Buffalo Bills in October.

Associated Press

top two teams turned into an all-time playoff classic. The Patriots dominated the first half, going into the break ahead 14-0, but in the second half MVP-favorite Patrick Mahomes led a furious comeback, eventually taking the lead with 2:03 to play. The drama didn't end there, as the Patriots retook the lead with 0:39 to play on a Rex Burkhead touchdown and then the Chiefs forced overtime with a late Harrison Butker 39-yard field goal. After New England won the overtime coin toss, the Patriots drove 75 yards on 13 plays, winning on a 2-yard touchdown run by Burkhead to advance to the franchise's fourth Super Bowl in five years.

Key play: Facing third and 10 with 0:54 to play, the Patriots looked finished after Rob Gronkowski let a Brady pass bounce off his hands and into

the waiting arms of Charvarius Ward for the game-sealing interception. But fortunately for the Patriots, Chiefs defensive lineman Dee Ford was lined up in the neutral zone, resulting in a 5-yard penalty and a second chance for the Patriots.

Quote: "They had no quit. Neither did we. We played our best football at the end," said an exhausted Brady after the game. "I don't know man, I'm tired. That was a hell of a game."

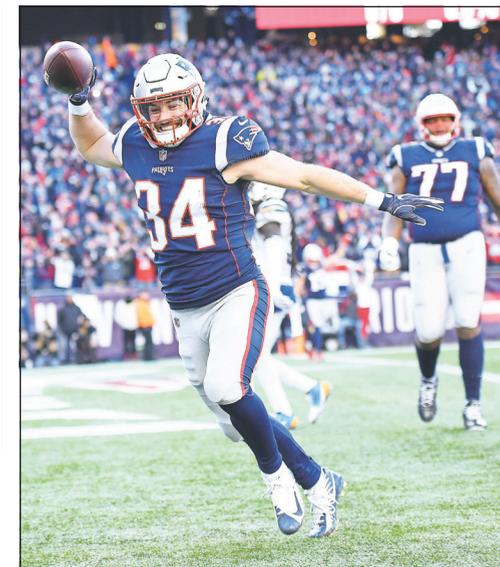
Super Bowl LIII

GAME 1: Los Angeles Rams vs New England

Sunday, Feb. 13, 2019
Atlanta, Georgia
Patriots 13, Rams 3



David Le photo
Josh Gordon (10) elevates and catches a ball over Green Bay Packers cornerback Bashaud Breeland (26) in November.



Rex Burkhead (34) celebrates his touchdown during the first half of the Divisional AFC playoff game against the Chargers.

PAUL BILODEAU/
Staff photo

The skinny: The Patriots defense dominated this game from the start, with a quick 3-and-out after Tom Brady interception. The tone was set. The Rams had trouble gaining yards the entire game while the Patriots controlled the clock on offense, primarily behind these two: Sony Michel, 18 rushes, 94 yards, 1 TD and Julian Edelman, 10 rec., 141 yards. The Rams ended up with only 260 yards, their lowest offensive output in the two years Sean McVay has been the head coach.

Key play: There was only one touchdown scored in third game — Sony Michel's 2-yard run — but it was the play before it that it up. After consecutive plays from the same formation, hitting Julian Edelman (13 yards) and Rex Burkhead (7 yards), Brady went to option No. 3 in

the same formation, hitting a streaking Rob Gronkowski down the left side with three defenders around him. Brady dropped it in perfectly to Gronkowski, who went down to get it at the Rams 2-yard line. The game was tied at the time and the Patriots assumed control from there.

Quote: "I'll start out by saying I'm proud of our football team, coaching staff, this entire organization. These guys worked so hard all year going all the way back to the offseason program in April and just grinding it out day after day. Players would come in, they worked extremely hard. We had our ups and downs over the course of the year. In the biggest moments when we had to play our best football and compete the hardest, they did it." — Patriots head coach Bill Belichick.

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UNSUNG ... BUT SPECIAL

Ten who helped Patriots capture sixth championship

By MAC CERULLO

We all know the stars and the future Hall of Famers — Tom Brady, Rob Gronkowski, Julian Edelman, the guys like that. But winning Super Bowl LIII and bringing a sixth Lombardi Trophy home to Foxborough took a complete team effort, including key contributions from less heralded players. Here's a look at 10 unsung heroes of the 2018 New England Patriots season.

Kyle Van Noy, LB

It's hard to believe that just two years ago, the Patriots all but stole Kyle Van Noy from the Detroit Lions. New England acquired the talented linebacker as part of a pick swap prior to the

2016 trade deadline, and while the former second-rounder had underwhelmed to that point, he has become one of the most crucial parts of the Patriots defense ever since.

Van Noy's value has been on display all season, but at no point was it clearer than during the Super Bowl. He had a sack, three quarterback hits and five pressures on Rams QB Jared Goff, and he was solid in coverage too, allowing just one completion in zone coverage. He is also one of the more colorful personalities in the locker room, and after Sunday's win, he was not shy about letting everyone know how happy he was to have proven all of the doubters wrong.

Continued, Page S30



Center David Andrews (60) and guard Joe Thuney (62) protected Tom Brady and opened large holes for Patriots running backs all season.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo



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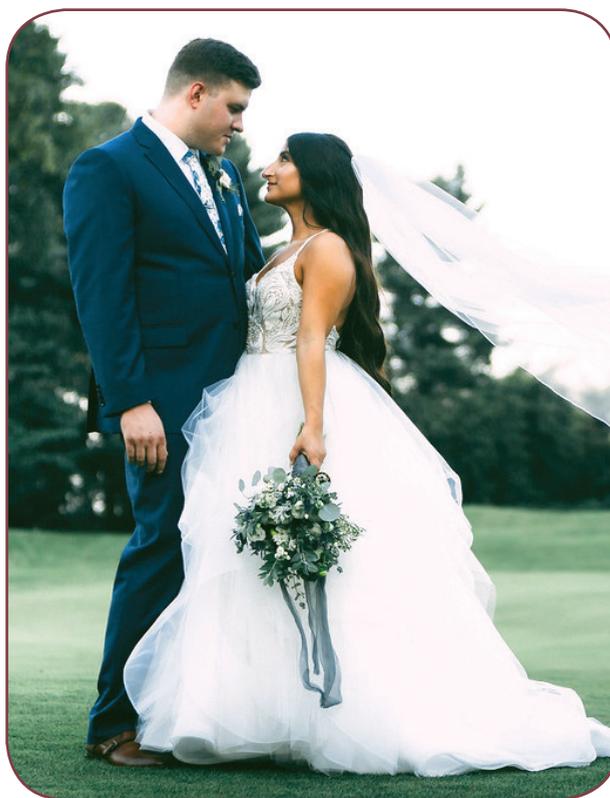
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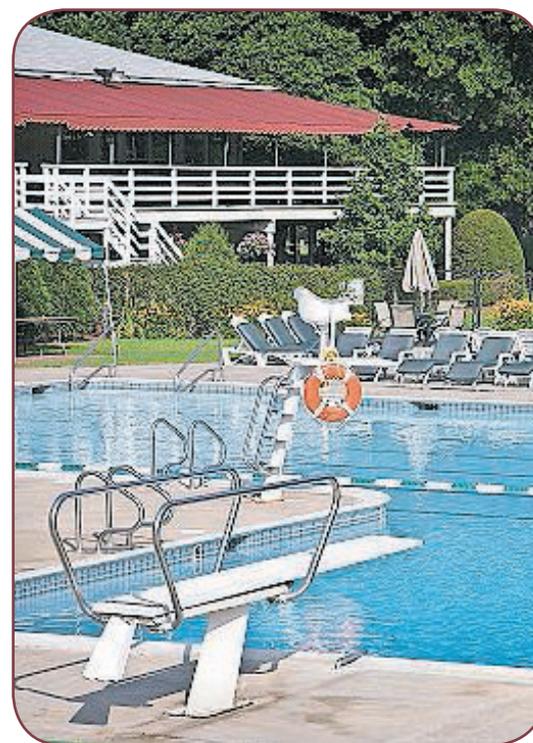
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■ *Continued from Page S28*
Jason McCourty, CB
 Devin and Jason McCourty are identical twins, but until this year their professional careers couldn't have been going any differently. Devin had never missed the playoffs and almost always at least reached the AFC Championship game, while until this season Jason had never made the playoffs at all. Last year he was part of a Cleveland Browns team that went 0-16, but this past offseason he was traded to the Patriots in a similar pick swap as the one that brought Kyle Van Noy to New England.
 Not initially expected to be a key contributor, McCourty had a great season, consistently grading as one of the top cornerbacks in football, according to Pro Football Focus. He also made one of the key plays of the Super Bowl, recovering from halfway across the field to break up a sure

touchdown pass to a wide open Brandin Cooks.
Trey Flowers, DE
 Trey Flowers isn't underrated or an "unsung hero" to anybody who knows football or can recognize a great defensive player. The man is an absolute stud and is going to get a huge new contract this offseason. But to the larger football public, he doesn't get as much respect as he deserves given that his sack totals aren't as gaudy as those of some of his pass rushing counterparts across the league.
 But for the Patriots, Flowers is a perfect edge rusher. He's physical, talented and able to get to opposing quarterbacks with ease. He's also selfless and willing to make the less flashy plays to help the team win. Case in point, earlier this season he told reporters about a nightmare he had — not about failing to sack the quarterback but about failing to set the edge on a running play.



Wide receiver Phillip Dorsett celebrates after scoring a touchdown during the first half of the AFC Championship game against the Kansas City Chiefs. Associated Press

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Patrick Chung, S

Patrick Chung embodies the phrase "Do Your Job." He has a specific job on the Patriots defense and does it just about better than anyone else in football. As a run-stopping safety, Chung does a lot of his work near the line of scrimmage, where he'll fill gaps, chase down runners and keep opposing ball carriers from getting free. But he's also solid in coverage and has made great strides since he was originally drafted by the Patriots in 2009.

Chung suffered a broken arm in the Super Bowl and also underwent a shoulder procedure to clean up an ailment that had been bothering him for weeks. While he will likely miss the team's offseason program, he is expected to be ready to go in time for training camp.

Joe Thuney, LG

The iron man of the offensive line, Joe Thuney played every single offensive snap for the Patriots this season, and dating back to his rookie year has played more than 99 percent of all of the team's snaps. He also became the first player in NFL history to start three consecutive Super Bowls in his first three years in the league. Against the Rams, he put forth a Herculean effort to help neutralize defensive tackle Aaron Donald, widely considered the best defensive player in football. Thuney, with occasional double-team help, held Donald to just two pressures, no sacks and two run stuffs.

David Andrews, C

An undrafted free agent, David Andrews has become one of the great success stories on an offensive line full of them. The University of Georgia product has now started in three consecutive Super Bowls, and this past season he was arguably the team's most reliable blocker, surrendering only one sack and four

pressures while committing just two holding penalties all season.

Trent Brown, LT

Perhaps the most shrewd offseason acquisition of 2018, the Patriots acquired the gargantuan Trent Brown from San Francisco for a third-round pick, and the 6-foot-8, 380-pound behemoth proceeded to enjoy his best season as a pro. Filling in for longtime left tackle Nate Solder, Brown was a terror in the run blocking game, and he showed surprising quickness to keep up with the athletic pass rushers he was tasked with blocking in order to keep Tom Brady on his feet. Brown will most likely earn a big contract for his efforts this coming offseason.

Phillip Dorsett, WR

Few Patriots players faced the kind of adversity that Phillip Dorsett faced this season. During training camp, Dorsett was

consistently one of New England's top wide receivers, fending off challenges from a revolving door of castoffs like Jordan Matthews, Kenny Britt and Eric Decker. Once the season began, he caught just about everything thrown his way, but following the midseason acquisition of Josh Gordon, his playing time all but dried up.

Dorsett hung in there, and after Gordon was suspended, he retook his spot in the lineup and continued to serve as a reliable pass catcher out wide for Brady. Surprisingly enough, Brady only threw two touchdown passes throughout the entire postseason, and both of those went to Dorsett.

Ryan Allen, P

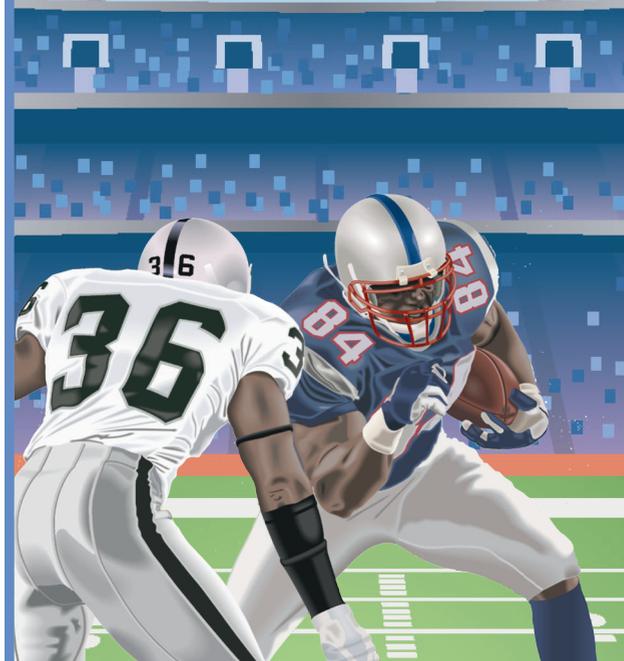
Few coaches emphasize special teams and field position the way Bill Belichick does, and Ryan Allen has become a valuable weapon for New England in both of those areas. His skills

were on full display in the Super Bowl, when Allen dropped three punts inside the Rams' 10-yard-line, all but dooming those drives as the ferocious New England defense forced quick three-and-outs, giving the Patriots great field position coming back the other way.

Albert McClellan, ST

Normally the class of the league, New England's special teams units were struggling by midseason. Kickoff and punt return coverage was an issue, so the Patriots decided to shake things up and bring in longtime Baltimore Ravens linebacker Albert McClellan. The veteran special teamer made an immediate impact, blocking two punts against the Dolphins. In the AFC Divisional Round against the Los Angeles Chargers, he recovered a muffed punt just before it went out of bounds, setting up another touchdown that made it 35-7 in the second quarter.

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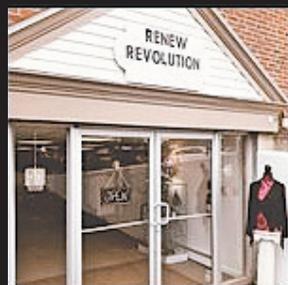
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THE BILL BURT FILES
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7



Patriots pride too much for Dolphins

By Bill Burt

FOXBOROUGH — It was a classic, AFC East, late-September mismatch of the 21st century.

You know, one of those games in which the New England Patriots outcoach, outplay, out-physical, out-adjust, out-pass, out-run, out-catch and, really, out-everything a divisional foe — this time the Miami Dolphins here at Gillette Stadium en route to a 38-7 win.

When have we seen this before? Too many times to mention.

But I believe something

else was boiling over here. Something few people, especially the ignorant Dolphins, would understand.

Pride.

Patriots pride.

We've been through a few of these experiences before, when doubt, especially at the national level, creeps in.

In the one-minute sound bites it's a great story: The Patriots are done, kaput and finished. The players hate Bill Belichick. And Tom Brady is too old.

Patriots Doubt (yes, with a capital "D") is probably more like Patriots Hope.

Everybody hopes this "arrogant" organization will go away.

Dolphins coach Adam Gase said he was surprised the Patriots out-physicaled his Dolphins. Really?

Has he read the press clippings the last 20 years? Has he listened to the national pundits as soon as this morning? Hasn't his team been whupped here in Foxborough, 35-17, last year and trailed 31-3 in 2016 before a few, fake, fourth-quarter touchdowns?

Maybe you can't totally blame the Dolphins and their players. This "winning" thing they've been going through the last month has never happened to most of these guys.

"I feel like it's nothing



JAIME CAMPOS/Staff photo

Patriots head coach Bill Belichick collects himself during the Sept. 30 game against the Dolphins.

they did," said Dolphins backup Jakeem Grant. He spoke pretty strongly for a guy who had two catches and 17 total yards.

"I feel like we went out there, and the penalties and all those things killed us," he added. "We just shot ourselves in the foot."

Analysis like this is why the Patriots are the Patriots, and the rest of the division eats their dirt/black pellets.

The Patriots have not lost three straight games since, get this, Oct. 27, 2002, when

they lost four straight en route to a 9-7 record.

The vocal backup from Miami, Grant, 26, had just turned 10 years old.

Do you think that's an act for Belichick, standing at the podium, after a loss? How about two losses, like last week in Detroit?

This week, as expected, had extra meaning.

Should anybody, other than the Dolphins, be surprised?

There was way too much at stake Sunday. A loss to

the Dolphins would have been more than a loss. It would have created a mountain only a top-tier Patriots team could climb, and this team isn't here just yet.

"Bill [Belichick] talked about practicing harder, flying around, guys not feeling sorry for themselves, and I thought we did that," said Patriots safety Devin McCourty.

"We talk about playing Patriot football," he added. "We talk about complementing each other, and we weren't doing it."

Everything isn't fixed on one Sunday afternoon against a neophyte AFC East foe. But it's a start.

It's been a while, maybe even eight months since the Patriots looked like the Patriots.

There's a lot to like. Julian Edelman is back. Sony Michel looked like a first-round pick. Josh Gordon might be closer than we think.

And this Patriots defense looked like a defense.

And the good old Indianapolis Colts will be here in four days.

All of sudden, life isn't too bad here at 1 Patriot Place.

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Brady, Patriots back where they belong

By Bill Burt

FOXBOROUGH — The NFL's New World Order, at least in the AFC, has officially been put on hold another year.

We can be confident of that after Sunday's action, including New England's 43-40 thriller over the Chiefs.

The Jacksonville Jaguars are who we thought they were — a team with a very good defense but without a good quarterback.

The Houston Texans and their quarterback, Dehaun Watson, aren't all that after all.

The Miami Dolphins and Cincinnati Bengal are, indeed, well, the Miami Dolphins and Cincinnati Bengals.

And last night's newbie, the Kansas City Chiefs, are very, very close, but not quite there yet.

It took only six weeks to play itself out, with 41-year-old Tom Brady ascending to his role as king again, and the Patriots and Steelers winning big AFC tilts, as if they'll probably be duking it out again in mid-January.

The Patriots are 4-2 and



JAIME CAMPOS/Staff photos
James White runs through an opening against the Chiefs.

now look like one of those 13-3/14-2 teams we've become accustomed to. While 12-4 is more realistic, when the Patriots' offense is running on all cylinders, the Patriots are Super Bowl

contenders. That's the good news, the Patriots are still the team to beat and it's probably going to be here at Gillette for the AFC crown.

But there was another



Chiefs running back Spencer Ware is wrapped up by Patriots defender.

story Sunday night, one a lot of people have alluded to the last few weeks. Brady met his match last night.

He met a guy, a millennial, who took a similar path — watched for a year, took notes and took over the job in Year Two.

Well, that guy, Patrick Mahomes, went mano a mano with the game's best ever. He lost, barely.

When your team scores 40 points and you were responsible for all of them, it isn't your fault.

Mahomes learned something late last night. That guy Brady he watched while growing up in Texas still is as good as advertised.

Their back and forth in the fourth quarter ... Chiefs took the lead 33-30 ... Pats took the lead 37-33 ...

Patriots take the lead 40-33 with 3:15 remaining after a 50-yard field.

It was over. Really?

One play is all it took, a 75-yard Mahomes pass to Tyreek Hill, to quiet 68,000 people and tie the score at 40-40 with 3:03 left.

It brought us to that age-old problem, time, as in too much of it for Brady.

There was one third down, a third-and-1, but the rest was Brady — 16 yards to James White, 39 yards to Rob Gronkowski.

It was crazy. It was a classic. It was vintage Brady.

It was vintage Patriots, who right now are back where they belong.

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More AFC East collateral damage as Pats find their way

By Bill Burt

FOXBOROUGH — Another one bites the dust.

Monday morning it will sadly be a nice guy, this time New York Jets head coach Todd Bowles. Earlier this week, it was Miami Dolphins quarterback Ryan Tannehill. His head coach, Adam Gase, might join him in the free agent market by lunchtime.

For almost two decades, the AFC East, aka the AFC East, has been a place where head coaches and “franchise quarterbacks” die on the vine.

Fifteen head coaches combined from Buffalo, Miami and the N.Y. Jets have been fired since this all started in 2001. And 28 starting quarterbacks, combined, have led those respective teams before this season.

No head coach-QB duo has been able to break the Patriots Curse since Bill Belichick and Tom Brady became Batman and Robin and have held onto the division with vise grips.

And, quite honestly, no team, head coach or quarterback have been close.

Certainly the Jets haven't



Patriots receiver Chris Hogan (15) dodges New York Jets Rashard Robinson (30).

HADLEY GREEN/Staff photo

been and weren't Sunday. They were smoked 38-3.

Rex Ryan came the closest. He made life interesting, but in the end it was more smoke than fire. Belichick and Brady had him removed from the premises in the Meadowlands and Buffalo.

“It's a tough place to be with Bill (Belichick) and Tom (Brady) there,” said Jets backup quarterback Josh McCown.

Offensive lineman Brian Winters completed his sixth NFL season, all with the Jets. He also completed his 10th loss in 12 outings vs. Belichick and Brady.

He doesn't know if or when his head coach is going to get fired. But nothing surprises him in this business and division.

“The Patriots are good, man, really good. Personally, I love playing them. I

really do. Personally, it's rivalry game for me,” said Winters, the right guard. “But I guess it's not a rivalry if you don't win too often.”

This was supposed to be the year for all of the AFC East teams to show progress.

The Bills were a playoff team last year, celebrating the occasion as if they had finally won a Super Bowl. And they, like the Jets, drafted a franchise quarterback, although the Jets' Sam Darnold and Buffalo's Josh Allen, like so many before them, may end up far from franchise players.

The Dolphins, who got off to a 3-0 start, finally appeared to have stability in the front office and coaching staff. Turns out it was complete instability.

And then we have the Jets and Bowles. They don't have one player who could draw fans at an autograph show, nobody who can change a game.

Darnold is a big tease. He makes two or three Aaron Rodgers-like completions and the rest is ... whatever. He appears to have been stricken with AFC East Disease only four months into his career.

Sunday was ugly: 16 of 28, 167 yards, 0 TDs

“It was tough being on the other side,” said elite Patriots cornerback Stephon Gilmore, who spent four years with the Bills before signing a \$40 million guaranteed contract (over three years) in the spring of 2017.

“Everyone starts the season thinking they have a chance and everything,” said Gilmore. “Then the Patriots are like 10-2 or whatever. It's nice being on the other side. Honestly, though, the expectations here are higher than they are other places.”

The Pats basically pummeled the Jets JVs — two starting defensive backs inactive, and two of their three best wide receivers, Jermaine Kearse and Quincy Enunwa, were hurt.

It was a perfect remedy for Brady and the offense, which sorely needed a good game with a bye week ahead of them.

The run-first, pass-second offense was put on hold as Brady threw the ball often to seven different receivers. For a while on Sunday, we forgot they don't have a legitimate speed threat that

every other team seems to have.

Precision was back. They were called for only four penalties. They didn't turn the ball over.

And the defense was sneaky tough again, allowing only 267 yards with those three measly points. And Kyle Van Noy scored on a 46-yard fumble return.

“Tom Brady finished? Right?” said McCown. “He figures it out. He always has. I know he's been with Bill (Belichick) for a long time, but he's had a lot of changing personnel over the years. But he always finds a way.”

Dominating the AFC East has its privileges. Despite taking some lumps this fall, the Patriots finished 5-1 in the division, securing a ninth-straight, first-round bye as the No. 2 seed.

Winters said while Belichick and Brady are great, it's not just those two.

“They don't make mistakes. It's that simple,” he said.

It sounds simple. Why can't any team in the AFC East emulate that?

Winters started smiling while walking away: “I wish I knew.”

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Kansas City will be Belichick's baby

By Bill Burt

FOXBOROUGH — Tom Brady and Sony Michel did their jobs yesterday at Gillette Stadium. Exceedingly well, I might add.

In fact, there are others that belong on that short list as in: Whoever blocked Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram get “A-pluses,” and the Patriots defensive backfield, too, other than one hiccup in the first quarter.

The New England Patriots embarrassed what we thought was a very good and tough L.A. Chargers team, 41-28, to advance to their eighth straight AFC championship.

I hate to say it, but that is sort of like the Bruins' old practice of putting up banners for division titles. Whatever.

That accomplishment, at least this week, is meaningless. The Patriots are on to Kansas City.

“Come on, you have to let me celebrate this for one night, right?” said Rob Gronkowski, after a block-filled performance.

OK ... time to move on.

This is a chore unlike anything the Patriots have faced and conquered this fall and early winter.

Arrowhead Stadium is a place of horrors for many teams, but especially the Patriots. The last time the Patriots were nationally written off was after that Monday night debacle in 2014, a 41-14 drubbing, to drop to 2-2.

That's where “We're on to Cincinnati” was born and where a Patriots beat writer asked Bill Belichick if Brady would be replaced by Jimmy Garoppolo.

The writer didn't get an answer, only the Belichick



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

Patriots quarterback Tom Brady (12) feeling little pressure in the pocket during the first half of the Divisional AFC playoff game against the Chargers at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro.

glare.

The 2018 Chiefs are as close to a great team as they've had in Kansas City. They have the best record in the conference, at 12-4, and they are electric on offense.

And we know the road performances of this particular team of Patriots.

That's where Belichick comes in.

Throw out what Brady, Michel and even Belichick did at Gillette Stadium early Sunday afternoon, which was basically a carbon copy of what they'd done two weeks earlier against the Jets.

The Chiefs have a legitimate star quarterback in Patrick Mahomes, a wide receiver in Tyreek Hill who gave the Patriots fits unlike any wide receiver in the Belichick Era with 14 receptions, 275 yards and four TDs over two games in 2017



Defensive end Trey Flowers (98) has his eyes on Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers (17) during the first half.

and 2018, and head coach Andy Reid, who is in his 20th season as head coach.

As good as the Patriots played against the Chargers, it won't be good enough to beat the Chiefs.

“They're the best team,”

Belichick said after the game about the top-seeded Chiefs. “We'll see how it goes; well-coached; they have a lot of explosive players.”

The Patriots were 3-5 on the road this season, with

three of those being never-in-it type games.

“That doesn't matter,” said playoff neophyte Jason McCourty, who'll be playing in his first AFC title game, versus eight straight for his twin brother, Devin.



“It's a different game,” said Jason. “Look what happened today. It doesn't matter what happened in the past.”

While the schedule says the Patriots have six days to get ready for the Chiefs and Arrowhead, I'm guessing Belichick has had somebody focused on these guys a few weeks longer, searching for tendencies.

Brady & Co. playing mistake-free football probably won't be enough.

Belichick will have to scheme at an elite level to pull this off. But guess what? He has, several times, like the Super Bowl wins over the Bills (1991) and Rams (2002) or the AFC title wins over the Steelers (2002) and Colts (2004).

His defensive game plan for when the Giants stunned the favored Bills, 20-19, is on display at the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

A Chiefs fan website asked people over the last week which team they preferred to play in the AFC title game, the Patriots or Chargers. They wanted the Patriots.

Here were a few of their responses:

“Brady can officially pass the torch to (Pat) Mahomes.”

“The Patriots are old.”

“The Patriots Dynasty can officially end at Arrowhead (Stadium).”

They might be right. Or, they might be wrong.

While the guys on the field will make the plays, the Patriots may need more, like Belichick intervention.

Patriots head to third straight Super Bowl

By Bill Burt

KANSAS CITY — Was it the best AFC Championship game ever?

Forty-eight points over the last 20 minutes. Tom Brady here. Patrick Mahomes there. Rinse and repeat.

But there is no doubt about the team that won – or outlasted – the Kansas City Chiefs, 37-31, in overtime last night.

The New England Patriots are going to their ninth Super Bowl in 18 years.

Here we go again. Two more weeks of buildup, as if we needed that.

While 50 percent doesn't cut it in a lot of things, that number – nine Super Bowls



in 18 years – is unfathomable in professional sports in the 21st century.

What did New Englanders do to deserve last night's result in overtime?

Remember, three months ago there was a Duck Boat parade for the Red Sox after their fourth World Series championship in 14 years.

This Patriots run, though, was different.

A few weeks ago, your Patriots were old, slow and doubted. And to be honest with you, it was deserved.

The pundits were having fun at the Patriots' expense. Brady was "in decline," Rob Gronkowski had a piano on his back, and Bill Belichick wasted a year of both.

The Patriots looked nothing like the team we've come to expect, which is near-perfection.

But doubting Batman and Robin – Bill Belichick and Tom Brady – is a losing proposition.

Beating the top-seeded Chiefs in the AFC Championship, at Arrowhead Stadium, might be one of the Top 10 accomplishments on Belichick's and Brady's unmatched resumes.

It took a dozen years and four tries to win a conference title outside



Sony Michel (26) reaches the end zone in the first half of the AFC Championship game against the Kansas City Chiefs. Associated Press photos



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Angie's list.

Foxborough – once in Indianapolis, twice in Denver – all losses to Peyton Manning, of all people.

The Patriots have been bullies since their first “dynastic” run of three Super Bowl championships in four years. They’ve been to four Super Bowls since that first run, but all of those trips went through Gillette Stadium.

Was the weather (10 degrees with windchill) a help Sunday? You’re darn tootin’ it was, at least for a half.

But so was the fact that this Patriots team was built more for cold than domes (FYI: the Super Bowl in Atlanta in two weeks is under a dome).

This is where Belichick’s genius comes in.

The Patriots are tough mentally and physically. They have committed to running the football, even when it doesn’t look pretty. And, to be honest, we didn’t get any bad body language from Brady that he wasn’t on board with the new, “dull” Patriots offense.

Last night it was 48 rushes



Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce (87) spins in the air as he is tackled by New England Patriots defensive back Jonathan Jones (31).

for 176 yards and four rushing touchdowns, for a repeat of the blowout win over the Chargers the week before.

Whether “Batman” informed “Robin” about the change, focusing on running the football changed everything.

A former Patriot, three-time Super Bowl champ Ted Johnson, compared the Patriots’ run the last few weeks to what LeBron James and Cleveland Cavs did his last two years there. They got through the regular season more concerned

about their game than their seeding.

It was a risk, we figured. The Pats can’t win the big one on the road, with their past performance as proof.

Was Belichick happy with the “Miami Miracle” and the fact that loss cost the



Patriots strong safety Patrick Chung (23) pressures Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

Patriots an eventual No. 1 seed? No.

But a No. 1 seed wasn’t the goal. The goal was to reclaim what has been this organization’s best trait, precision.

They did that. We saw it Sunday night in chilly Kansas City.

What about the Super Bowl? What about winning a sixth Super Bowl against a

high-quality team in the Los Angeles Rams?

Maybe enjoying what happened on Sunday night for a night or two (or three) might be in order.

The Patriots are back in the Super Bowl. With Belichick and Brady leading the way, to steal a line from a former Boston Celtic about a decade ago ... anything is possible.

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PATRIOTS SUPER BOWL HISTORY

SUPER BOWL XX

Jan. 26, 1986, at New Orleans
BEARS 46, PATRIOTS 10

The Zero: Watching Tony Eason melt in an 0-for-6, three-sack performance will forever be etched into Pats history.

The Game-Breaker: Defensive tackle William "Refrigerator" Perry plunges in from the 1 to score as many TDs as the Patriots on this day.

Place in History: New England's amazing "wild card" run, during which they "Squished the Fish" in Miami, ends one win from immortality.

SUPER BOWL XXXI

Jan. 27, 1997, at New Orleans
PACKERS 35, PATRIOTS 21

The Zero: Bill Parcells, immortalized here for saving the franchise and keeping it in New England, is fitted for goat horns when, realizing he was not to coach the Pats again, he does not fly home with the team.

The Game-Breaker: Desmond Howard's 99-yard kick return for a touchdown seals the Pats' fate.

Place in History: The Parcells era ends but leaves New England football fans insatiably hungry for a championship.

SUPER BOWL XXXVI

Feb. 3, 2002, at New Orleans
PATRIOTS 20, RAMS 17

The Hero: Tom Brady is the game MVP after driving the Pats down the field in the final 90 seconds for the game-winning field goal.

The Game-Breaker: Adam Vinatieri boots the game-winning kick from 48 yards as time expires.

Place in History: Bill Belichick delivers the first Lombardi Trophy in franchise history.

SUPER BOWL XXXVIII

Feb. 1, 2004, at Houston
PATRIOTS 32, PANTHERS 29

The Hero: Tom Brady wins his second Super Bowl MVP trophy, and the accompanying Cadillac, in three years.



Patriots cornerback Stephon Gilmore (24) snags an interception during the fourth quarter of Super Bowl LIII.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

The Game-Breaker: Automatic Adam strikes again, this time knocking home the game-winning 41-yarder with four seconds to play.

Place in History: The foundation for a potential dynasty

is now in place.

SUPER BOWL XXXIX

Feb. 6, 2005, at Jacksonville
PATRIOTS 24, EAGLES 21

The Hero: Receiver Deion Branch (11 catches, 133 yards)

ends Brady's hold on the MVP trophy.

The Game-Breaker: Rodney Harrison ices it in the final minutes with his second interception of the game.

Place in History: Finishing



Associated Press

Patriots strong safety Malcolm Butler (21) intercepts a pass intended for Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Ricardo Lockette during the second half of Super Bowl XLIX.

with the trophy at 17-2, the best team in New England Patriots history rests its case.

SUPER BOWL XLII

Feb. 3, 2008, at Glendale, Arizona
GIANTS 17, PATRIOTS 14

The Zero: The offensive line swallows the blame collectively by giving up five sacks to a four-man rush.

The Game-Breaker: It was over when David Tyree wedged a fourth-down conversion catch against the top of his helmet.

Place in History: New England's bid for a perfect season ends at 18-1.

The Game-Breaker: Ahmad Bradshaw puts the Giants ahead for good with the only score of the fourth quarter on a late 6-yard TD run.

Place in History: Suddenly the once-invincible Brady is 3-2 on the game's biggest stage, with both losses coming to an ordinary Eli Manning.

SUPER BOWL XLIX

Feb. 1, 2015, at Glendale, Arizona
PATRIOTS 28, SEAHAWKS 24

The Hero: Tom Brady won the MVP Award, his third. But the real hero was a rookie, backup defensive back Malcolm Butler, who intercepted the ball at the goal line to clinch the deal.

The Game-Breaker: The Patriots trailed 24-14, but scored two fourth-quarter

SUPER BOWL XLVI

Feb. 5, 2012, at Indianapolis
GIANTS 21, PATRIOTS 17

The Zero: Is it Wes Welker or Tom Brady? Either way, if they connect on that fourth-quarter pass, this one is over.

touchdowns, including the game-winner by Julian Edelman before the two-minute warning.

Place in History: The Patriots become one of only six franchises with four Super Bowls. Brady and coach Bill Belichick are the second QB-coach combo with four rings.

SUPER BOWL LI

Feb. 5, 2017, at Houston
PATRIOTS 34, FALCONS 28 (OT)

The Hero: Tom Brady or James White — take your pick. Brady got hot at the right time, completing 12 of 16 passes in the fourth quarter and overtime for 150 yards. White, like Brady, had been quiet before the comeback — the Pats trailed 28-3 late in the third quarter. White scored three touchdowns and added a two-point conversion, giving him 20 points, the most ever in a Super Bowl. Brady completed 43 of 62 passes for 466 yards. White finished 29 rushing yards, 14 receptions and 110 yards receiving.

The Game-Breaker: Julian

Edelman's incredible 23-yard reception, on the eventual game-tying touchdown drive, was battered and appeared to be an interception before he remarkably snatched the ball, in between two legs, just 2 inches from the turf.

Place in History: Brady and Belichick were the only player and coach to combine for five Super Bowls together.

SUPER BOWL LII

Feb., 4, 2018 at
Minneapolis, Minn.

EAGLES 41, PATRIOTS 33

The Zero: While this game will always be known as the "How-come-Malcolm-Butler-didn't-play?" game, it could also be known as the worst defensive performance in Super Bowl history. The Eagles only punted once. And they moved the ball way too easily with a backup quarterback-turned-MVP in Nick Foles. The Patriots actually took the lead, 33-32, in the fourth quarter.

The Game Breaker: The Eagles were equally inept

on defense for 99 percent of the game. But there was one play with only 2:16 remaining in the game that all but ended the Patriots' and Brady's comeback hopes when defensive lineman Brandon Graham strip-sacked Brady and it was recovered by defensive end Derek Barnett.

Place in history: It was another tough Super Bowl loss. Maybe it wasn't as brutal as the dual losses to the Giants, but it was close. Brady appeared to be leading the Patriots to another championship, in the final minute, only to have it stripped away. Literally.

SUPER BOWL LIII

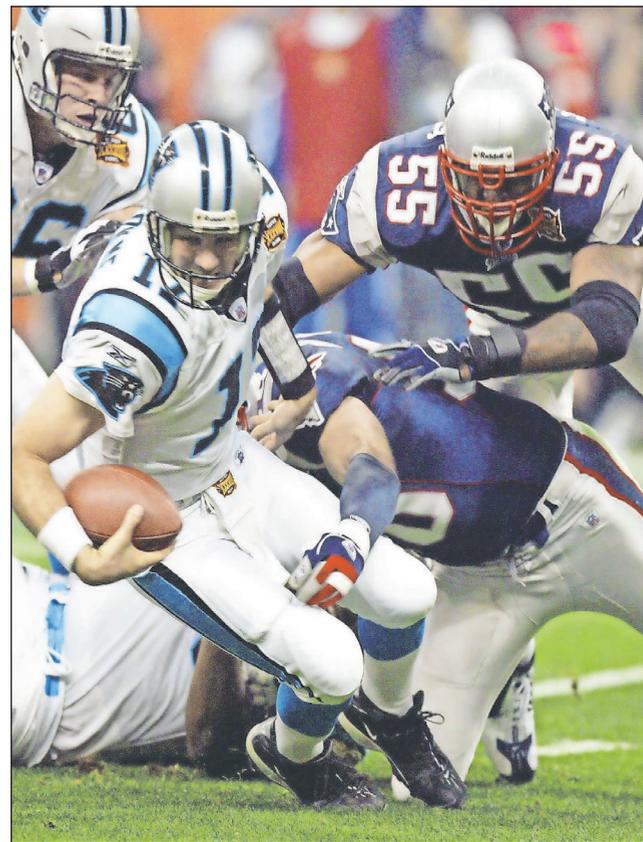
Feb. 3, 2019 at Atlanta
PATRIOTS 13, RAMS 3

The Hero: In the end, Patriots slot receiver Julian Edelman was deemed the MVP (10 rec., 141 yards), but cases could be made for Sony Michel (18 rushes, 94 yards, 1 TD), Dont'a Hightower (2 sacks), Stephon Gilmore (1 int.), Kyle Van Noy (1 sack). In fact, the

entire Patriots defense was special. The Patriots had so many big performances when the lights were at their brightest, including head coach Bill Belichick.

The Game-Breaker: Tom Brady's 29-yard pass to a streaking Rob Gronkowski down the left side with three defenders around him changed the game. Brady dropped the ball in perfectly to Gronkowski, who went down to get it at the Rams 2-yard line. The game was tied at the time and the Patriots assumed control from there. Jason McCourty's breakup of a Brandin Cooks apparent reception, in the back of the end zone, kept the Rams from getting the lead in the third quarter. Another huge play.

Place in history: The Patriots earned their sixth Super Bowl title, tying the Pittsburgh Steelers for the most all-time in the Super Bowl era. As for Tom Brady and Bill Belichick, both separated themselves in terms of championships.



Panthers quarterback Jack Delhomme is sacked by Patriots Mike Vrabel (50) and Willie McGinest (55) in Super Bowl XXXVIII.

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SUPER PATRIOTS

A look inside New England's football dynasty

41: Quarterback Tom Brady's age, the oldest quarterback to win the Super Bowl.

2: The number of times Tom Brady didn't win MVP in the six Patriots Super Bowl wins

1926: The year the Boston Bulldogs were created — and dismantled — a foray into pro football for Massachusetts long before the Boston/New England Patriots came along. Later,

in 1932, came the Boston Redskins (originally the Braves), but the team moved to Washington, D.C. after five years.

4: The number of Patriots' moves between 1960 and 1971. They played in Nickerson Field, Fenway Park, Harvard Stadium and Boston College's Alumni Stadium.

1985/86: The season that saw the Patriots make history by winning three road playoff games to advance to

the team's first Super Bowl, against the Chicago Bears.

18th: The round of the Major League Baseball draft in 1995 in which the Montreal Expos took Brady, then an all-state catcher for Juni-pero Serra High, an all-boys Catholic high school.

21: The record for consecutive wins, including playoffs, set by the Patriots during their back-to-back Super Bowl seasons in 2003-04.

25: Years Bob Kraft has



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady is swarmed by photographers on the field after the Patriots beat the Los Angeles Rams 13-3 in Super Bowl LIII at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

owned the team, having bought the Patriots in January 1994.

10: Bob Kraft's record, as an owner, for the most

conference championships.

9: The number of seasons in which Brady has started in three playoff games.

6: Kraft's record, as an owner, for Super Bowl wins.

1971: The year the Pats' "new" home, Schaefer

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New England Patriots owner Bob Kraft walks onto the field before the start of Super Bowl LIII at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. In the 25 years Kraft has owned the team, it has gone to the Super Bowl 10 times, winning six.



Patriots running back James White scores the game-winning touchdown in Super Bowl LI against the Falcons. The rings for winning Super Bowl LI cost \$37,000 each.

Stadium, barely passed a mandatory flush test, which involved flushing every toilet simultaneously. Flooding occurred and had to be repaired before the opener, per health inspectors.

11: The number of games in the 1990 season in which the Patriots never held a lead. They finished the year 1-15.

2: The number of times the Patriots have missed the playoffs during the Belichick-Brady era, both times

being the seventh seed, in 2002 and 2008.

15: The number of games started by quarterback Matt Cassel in the 2008 season. The Patriots made history in 2005 when they drafted Cassel in the seventh round. He was the first quarterback to start an NFL game having never started in college (at the University of Southern California).

114.4 million: The number of viewers who saw

the Pats win over Seattle in Super Bowl XLIX, which at the time was the most-watched telecast in television history.

120.7 million: The number of viewers who watched the Super Bowl XLIX half-time show, which featured Katy Perry and introduced to the world the now-infamous Left Shark.

\$5.5 million: The Patriots' outlay for 150 Super

Continued, Page S42




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Bowl rings after the win over Seattle.

\$37,000: The most money spent on a Super Bowl ring (after win over Atlanta).

\$72 million: The money secured by the Massachusetts Legislature to build Gillette Stadium when Kraft was threatening to move the team to Hartford in 1998.

\$8 million: Gillette's annual expense for naming rights of the former CMGI Field, built 300 yards from the old stadium in Foxborough. The name was revisited after one season when CMGI's stock plummeted. Gillette signed a 15-year deal for exclusive naming rights, then signed another 15-year deal in 2013.

21 yards: The distance of Brady's first career touchdown pass, thrown to Terry Glenn on Oct. 14, 2001, against the San Diego Chargers.

7: Numbers retired by the Patriots: Gino Cappelletti (20), Mike Haynes (40),



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski (87) breaks away from Los Angeles Chargers cornerback Michael Davis (43) during the first half of the Divisional AFC playoff game in January.

Steve Nelson (57), John Hannah (73), Bruce Armstrong (78), Jim Lee Hunt (79) and Bob Dee (89)

24: The number requested by veteran safety Adrian Wilson when he joined the Patriots in 2013, since it

had been his number for his entire 12-year career. However, it was already assigned to cornerback Kyle Arrington. Wilson made a deal with Arrington, the father of a new baby, offering a year's supply of diapers in exchange for the

number. Arrington agreed and a truckload of diapers arrived.

5,453: Sam Cunningham's rushing yards over 10 years with the Patriots. Cunningham, who retired in 1982, still leads the franchise in

all-time rushing yards.

59: The Patriots' score in the most lopsided win in franchise history, on Oct. 18, 2009, when they shut out the Tennessee Titans.

102: Tight end Rob Gronkowski's yards from six receptions during his first career 100-yard game. It was the final game of the regular season in his rookie year. He also had a touchdown.

1993: The year that former owner James Orthwein and his marketing team reportedly asked NFL Properties to develop a new team logo and uniform color scheme, which included the "Flying Elvis" on the helmets.

13: Seasons played by the Patriots before the team made the playoffs in 1976. That year, the Patriots beat the New Orleans Saints, 27-6, at Foxborough to qualify for their first NFL playoff appearance since the 1963 AFL Championship game.

1971: The year the team relocated to the town

of Foxborough and was briefly renamed the "Bay State Patriots." The name was rejected when people pointed out its abbreviation: B.S. Patriots.

27 minutes: The length of time, still a Super Bowl record, that the Patriots and Panthers played in Super Bowl XXXVIII before either team scored. In the same game, the teams combined to score 37 points in the fourth quarter — the most ever in a single quarter of a Super Bowl.

44 yards: The passing yards attained by D. Harvey White, the first-ever Patriots quarterback, who signed in December 1959 and played just three games. He finished his season with three completions on seven attempts.

\$3.8 billion: The value of the New England Patriots, as estimated by Forbes Magazine, putting them at second in the NFL behind Dallas Cowboys (\$5 billion).

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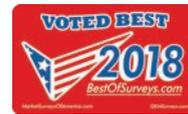


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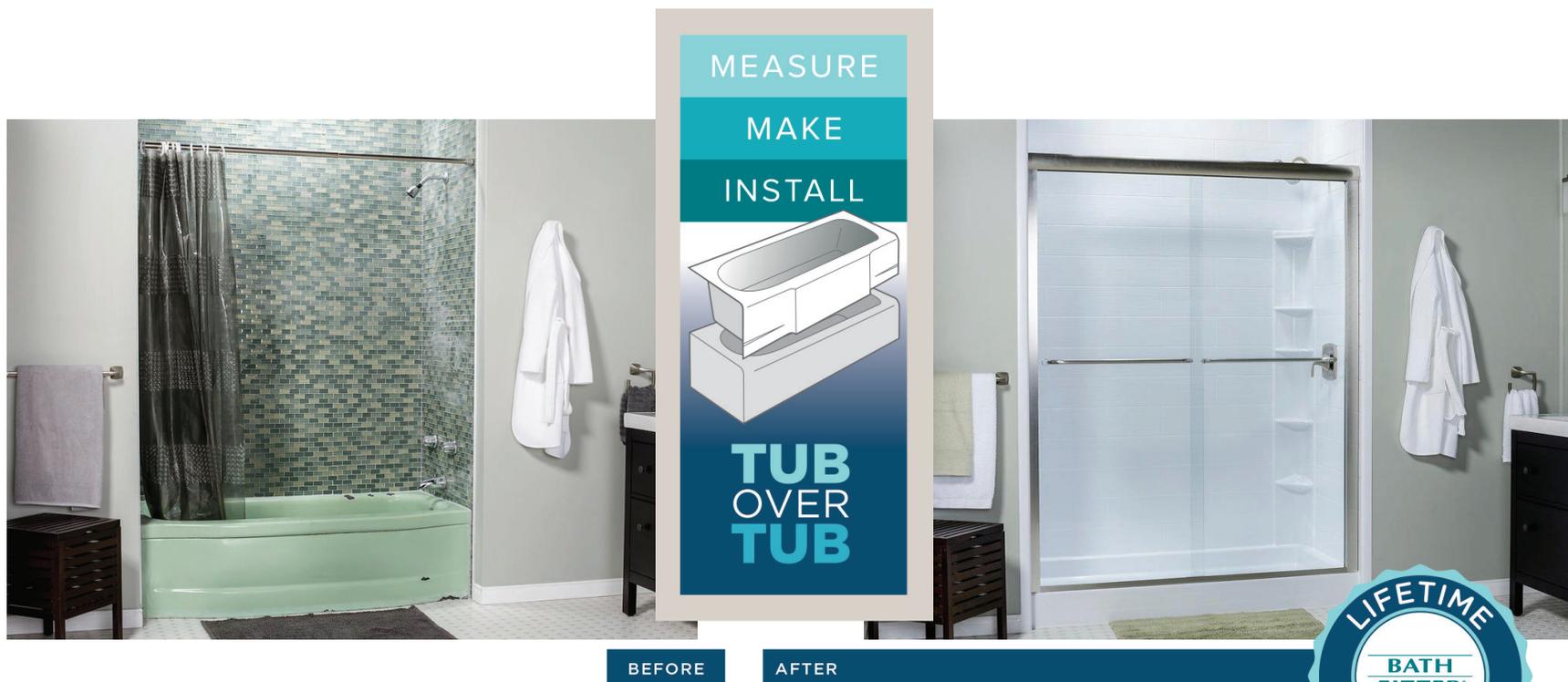
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By Ted Johnson

'Teddy Three Rings' thankful for Patriots, Belichick and Brady

Editor's Note: Ted Johnson played middle linebacker for the Patriots for 10 seasons, from 1995 through 2004. The Colorado University graduate was a second-round draft



pick by Bill Parcells. He not only helped the Patriots win three Super Bowls, he was named to the Patriots all '90s team. He now lives in the Boston area. He wrote this column for this publication celebrating the 2018 Patriots season and Super Bowl championship.

All you need to know about my professional football career is my "nickname" in the Houston area: "Teddy Three Rings."

Honestly, I like it. It's got a nice "ring" to it. (Sorry about the bad pun!)

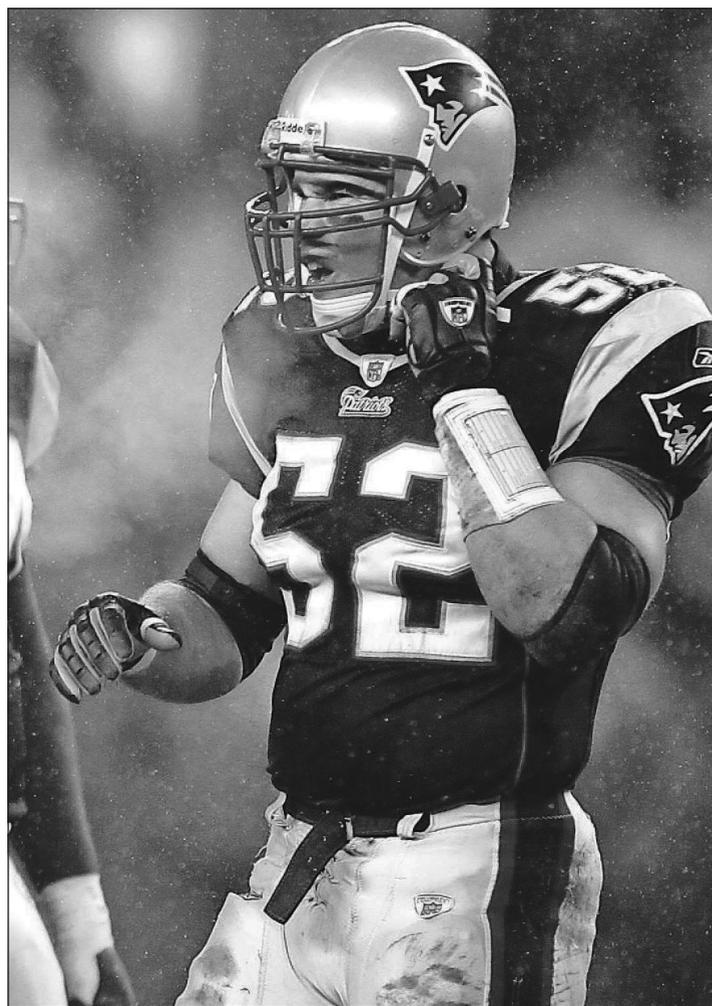
It's not as snazzy as, say, Tommy Six Rings, but I'll take it.

What can I say about your (and my) New England Patriots, fresh off another Super Bowl championship over a tough Los Angeles Rams team?

I'm a co-host of a sports talk radio show in Houston, where I spent a lot of time growing up, and I get asked about the Patriots and comparing the team to other great franchises. My answer: There isn't anything to compare it. Their success is unprecedented.

I believe, considering the financial constraints and the small windows most teams have, that this will never be duplicated. Not in my lifetime. Not in my kids' lifetimes. And not in my grandkids' — who aren't even born yet — lifetimes.

We have to start referencing Tom Brady not with great players but with legendary athletes, like Michael Jordan and Muhammad Ali.



Ted Johnson during his playing days with the Patriots.

Look at the NFL now? There are some great quarterbacks. Who is in his category? Aaron Rodgers might be the closest, and he's not even close.

And then there is Bill Belichick.

What he's done over the last 18 seasons will never be touched again. I was there at the beginning, when he got there, in 2000. We were floundering after Bill Parcells, who drafted me in 1995, had righted the ship here in New England.

Bill (Belichick) took it to another level -- and then another level after that.

His attention to detail is incredible. He also has an uncanny ability to predict what the other team is going to do. I've never seen or heard anything like it.

Now, we are in uncharted waters as a coach, remembering he is the guy in charge of the roster, too.

So what happens when you have the best quarterback of all time and the best coach of all time? You have the Patriots.

I laugh when I hear about which one has more to do with the success. They both do.

Bill Belichick needs Tom

Brady as much as Tom Brady needs Bill Belichick. And by that I mean unparalleled and unmatched success.

Bill may want to satisfy the itch of winning a Super Bowl with another quarterback, but I'm not sure if he'll ever get that chance. Nor should he.

Tom doesn't appear to be finished any time soon. And Tom knows there is not another team out there that can give him what the Patriots can give him, which is more Super Bowls. His best chance is to stay hitched to Bill's wagon.

I probably could have played another year or two. But I remembered thinking, "This is probably the right time to end it, with a Super Bowl ring," which was three rings in four years.

After the 2002 season, I'd considered leaving the Patriots. There were some issues I had with the organization, but in the end, I loved my teammates and I saw we would have more chances to win.

Did I predict back-to-back Super Bowls in 2003 and 2004? No.

I was lucky. I didn't have as big of a role as I did earlier in my career and lost a little money because of it, but I made the right decision for me.

Super Bowl Week in Atlanta brought back some great memories for me, especially from back in the Boston area.

Football is king back there. When I come by to visit, I can't believe the number of guys making money on the side doing advertisements and TV shows.

When I came back to the Boston area, I've had people offering to buy me a beer or pay for my dinner a lot. Fans still treat me like I'm on the team.

I guess, in a lot of ways, I still am.

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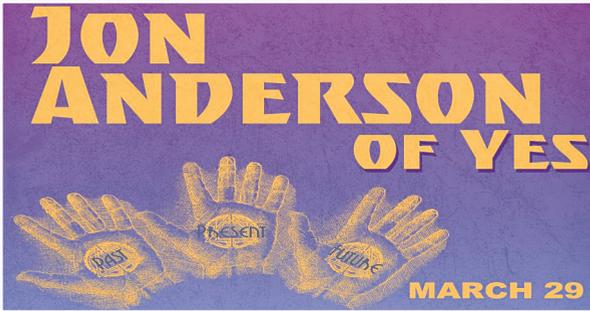
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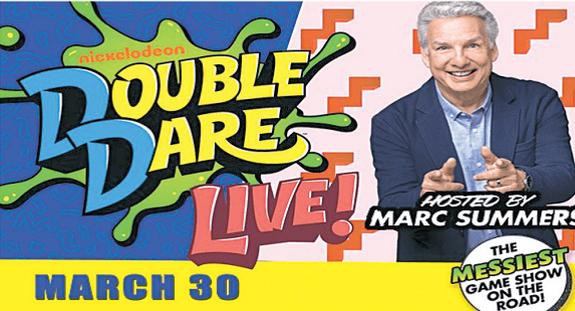
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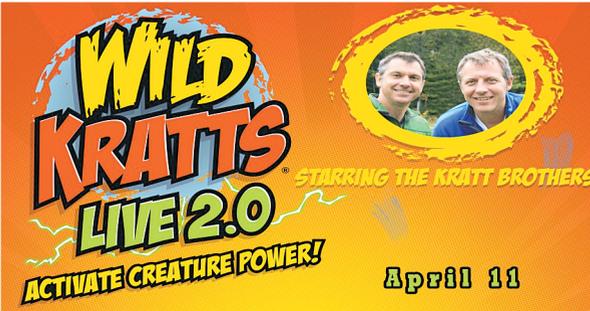
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