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New England Patriots

While the Atlanta Falcons look to secure their first league championship in team history, the New England Patriots are trying to add one for the thumb.

The Pats are in their ninth Super Bowl, the most by any franchise. (Dallas, Denver and Pittsburgh have been to eight.) With the win, New England will earn its fifth title, which would tie Dallas and San Francisco for second all-time. The Steelers are first with six Super Bowl titles.

COACH AND QB POWERHOUSE

Coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady have catalyzed all the Patriots' Super Bowl wins. They won their first three in a four-year span (2002-05) but had to wait 10 years for

their next championship.

Where would a fifth win rank the duo all-time? Belichick would move ahead of Chuck Noll and Brady ahead of Joe Montana and Terry Bradshaw for most Super Bowl wins ever.

SHORT-HANDED YET SUCCESSFUL

The Patriots have been without tight end Rob Gronkowski for half the season. Generally losing a player of Gronk's caliber leads to simplifying the playbook and offensive philosophies. Not in New England.

Brady has benefited from a deep

wide receiver and tight end position that has included consistent play from Julian Edelman, Chris Hogan, Malcolm Mitchell, Danny Amendola and Martellus Bennett. Running backs Dion Lewis and James White also have helped the Pats succeed offensively in lieu of Gronk.

DEFENSE OPTIONAL?

Many expect the Falcons-Patriots to be a high-scoring affair — and for good reason. The game will feature two of the most potent offenses in the league.

But if Malcolm Butler and New

England's defense have anything to say about it, fans can look for solid play from the Patriots' secondary. Butler saved Super Bowl XLIX for the Patriots with his goal-line interception against the Seahawks and will likely draw the tough assignment of covering Falcons wide receiver Julio Jones.

This could give fans one of the best matchups to watch on Super Bowl Sunday. Butler is helped by solid defensive line and linebacker play, as well as an offense that can certainly play from behind should the Falcons jump out to an early lead.