

Sports

NFL DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

Brady, Bucs eliminate New Orleans

By Brett Martel
AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS — Tom Brady's best game in three tries against New Orleans kept the Buccaneers moving on in the NFL playoffs, and has Saints quarterback Drew Brees headed home — perhaps for good.

Brady and the Bucs' offense turned three of four Saints turnovers into touchdowns and Tampa Bay beat New Orleans 30-20 in the divisional round of the playoffs Sunday night.

Two of those touchdowns came on short passes to Mike Evans and Leonard Fournette. And after linebacker Devin White snagged the second of three interceptions thrown by Brees, Brady drove the Bucs to the 1, from where he scored himself with 4:57 left to virtually ensure his 14th trip to a conference championship game — his first in the NFC.

That game will take place in Green Bay next week, where the 43-year-old Brady will try



Chris Graythen/Getty Images-TNS

Tom Brady (12) of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers celebrates a first down against the New Orleans Saints late in the fourth quarter in the NFC Divisional Playoff game at the Mercedes Benz Superdome in New Orleans on Jan. 17.

to advance to his 10th Super Bowl in a showdown with Packers All-Pro QB Aaron Rodgers.

"We worked hard to get to this point. Two road playoff wins is pretty sweet," Brady said. "We've got to go beat a great football team we know pretty well. Aaron's playing incredible."

Meanwhile, the Brees era in New Orleans could be over after 15 seasons.

While just 3,750 tickets were distributed in the 73,000-seat Superdome to comply with local COVID-19 restrictions, the fans made themselves heard with an eruption of cheers when the 42-year-old Brees first took the field for New Or-

leans (13-5), seemingly sensing this could be their last chance to see him play at home.

Brees, under contract for one more year, declined to say whether he's retiring. After he'd changed in the locker room, he walked back onto the field and watched his four children play, at one point sharing a long embrace with his wife, Brittany.

"I appreciate all that this game has given to me," Brees said. "There are obviously so many incredible memories."

If it was his last game, it won't be one he'll want to remember. The NFL's all-time leader in completions and yards passing was 19 of 34 for 134 yards, one touchdown and three interceptions.

"A couple of them I probably shouldn't have thrown and maybe forced it," Brees said. "That's what this game came down to is those turnovers because all of those gave them the ball deep in our territory, and you can't do that with (Tampa Bay's) offense."

Spurs roll past Blazers

By Erik García Gundersen
Associated Press

PORTLAND — LaMarcus Aldridge had 22 points, DeMar DeRozan had 20 points and 11 assists as the San Antonio Spurs defeated the Portland Trail Blazers 125-104 on Monday.

Rudy Gay and Patty Mills came off the bench for 21 points apiece as the Spurs reserves outscored Portland backups 59-24. Reserve center Jakob Poeltl added 11 points and seven rebounds, six of which came on the offensive glass.

Damian Lillard led Portland with 35 points.

Carmelo Anthony's basket with 2 1/2 minutes left in the third quarter gave the Trail Blazers an 80-78 lead.

The Spurs took over from there, later using an 11-0 run for a 95-82 lead early in the fourth period. Rodney Hood's 3-pointer on the next Blazers possession after a timeout stopped that burst, but San Antonio kept pulling away.

TIP-INS

- **Spurs:** The game was played on Martin Luther King Jr. Day — the NBA celebrates the holiday with a big slate of games every year. Popovich, who is often outspoken about matters outside of the game, called the civil rights leader a "modern founding father" and the "conscience" of the country.

- **Blazers:** After leaving Saturday night's game against Atlanta with a sprained foot, guard CJ McCollum will be out at least another week, coach Terry Stotts said. McCollum will be re-evaluated next week after MRIs showed the sprain. McCollum was averaging a career-high 26.7 points and five assists per game prior to the injury. Hood got the start in McCollum's place.

Chiefs hold off Browns, 22-17, despite injury to Mahomes

By Dave Skretta
AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs had lost Patrick Mahomes to a concussion and were in danger of losing the game.

Then their defense and Chad Henne — their defense and Chad Henne?! — along with a gutsy call by Andy Reid kept their hopes of a Super Bowl repeat alive, holding off the Cleveland Browns 22-17 on Sunday to advance to their third straight AFC championship game.

With their star quarterback reduced to a spectator, the oft-forgotten

bunch opposite Mahomes' high-powered offense forced the Browns to punt in the waning minutes. Then, his 35-year-old backup showed some moxie with a 13-yard third-down scramble and audacious fourth-down completion to Tyreek Hill — when go-for-broke Reid decided to go for it — that gave the Chiefs (15-2) a first down with just over a minute left and allowed them to run out the clock.

"That's why we love Big Red. He's always on time," Chiefs safety Tyrann Mathieu said. "He's like our spirit warrior out here behind the scenes. He's always trying stuff. We always

knew he has one play on the table."

Or, as Mahomes wrote on Twitter after the win: "#HenneThingIsPossible."

"We go through all those Saturday night with the quarterbacks, those situations: Fourth-and-1 to win the game, what do you want?" said Reid, who never once thought about punting on fourth down. "My coaches were on board, they all did a great job with the spot, with the calls, everything — they were spot-on. It was a great job."

Mahomes hadn't played in 21 days, since the Chiefs clinched the AFC's top seed in Week 16, but he hardly

missed a beat before leaving mid-way through the third quarter. He finished 21 of 30 for 255 yards and a TD, and ran for another score.

Harrison Butker added three field goals for the Chiefs, who nearly blew a 19-3 lead but survived to become the first AFC team to host three consecutive conference title games. They'll face the Buffalo Bills next Sunday.

"It stings," Browns coach Kevin Stefanski said. "We came here to win and didn't get the job done. There is a finality to that."

Baker Mayfield threw for 204

yards with a touchdown and a pick for the Browns (12-6), who were coming off their first playoff win since the 1994 season. But their inability to drive for the winning touchdown — they punted with 4:23 left in the game — and defensive letdown kept them from winning two playoff games in a season for the first time since 1950.

"It came down to us on defense and we let it slip," Browns pass rusher Myles Garrett said. "We had two opportunities. We didn't make it happen. It was right in front of us and we just — this time we didn't get it done."

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