

# Tom Brady returning to Tampa to play 23rd season in NFL

BY ROB MAADDI

AP Pro Football Writer

TAMPA, Fla. — Tom Brady's retirement lasted 40 days.

Brady said Sunday, March 13, that he's returning to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for his 23rd NFL season.

The seven-time Super Bowl champion announced his decision on Twitter and Instagram, saying he has "unfinished business." The news stole the spotlight from the NCAA's Selection Sunday.

"These past two months I've realized my place is still on the field and not in the stands," Brady wrote. "That time will come. But it's not now. I love my teammates, and I love my supportive family. They make it all possible. I'm coming back for my 23rd season in Tampa."

Brady led the Buccaneers to a Super Bowl title following the 2020 season and NFC South championship last season. He teamed with coach Bill Belichick to win six Super Bowls during 20 seasons with the New England Patriots.

The 44-year-old Brady led the NFL in yards passing

(5,316), touchdowns (43), completions (485) and attempts (719) in 2021, but the Buccaneers lost at home to the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional round.

"Tom Brady loves to play football as much as anyone I have ever been around," Buccaneers coach Bruce Arians said. "As Tom said, his place right now is on the football field. He is still playing at a championship level and was as productive as anyone in the league last season. We are ecstatic that he decided to continue playing and working toward winning another championship."

Brady cited his desire to spend more time with his wife, supermodel Gisele Bündchen, and three children when he decided to walk away from the game on Feb. 1. But he changed his mind about staying home, a day after attending the Manchester United match against Tottenham Hotspur. Brady sat with the Glazer Family, who own Manchester United and the Buccaneers.

His reversal sent shock waves throughout the sports



Tribune News Service

Tom Brady announced Sunday, March 13, 2022, that he is returning to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for his 23rd NFL season.

world, and his teammates and Buccaneers fans reacted with jubilation.

All-Pro right tackle Tristan Wirfs called it "unreal." Receivers Mike Evans and Chris Godwin shared their joy in emojis.

Giants safety Logan Ryan said Brady's return is "good for football." Rams star cornerback Jalen Ramsey tweeted: "THANK YOU! throw that last touchdown on somebody else."

Many Hall of Fame players across several sports returned to playing after retiring, including Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Bob Cousy in the NBA, Brett Favre and Reggie White in the NFL, Guy Lafleur and Mario Lemieux in the NHL.

The Buccaneers are hopeful star tight end Rob Gronkowski also returns. Brady convinced his buddy to unretire to join

him in Tampa in 2020. The team lost Pro Bowl guard Ali Marpet, who retired at age 28. But Godwin is staying after getting the franchise tag.

Brady's decision comes right before the NFL free agency period begins. The Bucs have several key players set to hit the open market: running back Leonard Fournette, cornerback Carlton Davis, safety Jordan Whitehead, linebacker Jason Pierre-Paul, defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh, Gronkowski and others.

They kept one of those key players when Pro Bowl center Ryan Jensen agreed to a three-year contract late Sunday night, his agent Mike McCartney said on Twitter.

Brady's return should impact their decisions and the team's plans. Tampa's odds for winning the Super Bowl went from 25:1 to 7 1/2:1, tied with Green Bay for second-best behind Buffalo at 7:1, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

"We are thrilled that Tom has decided to come back this season," Bucs general manager Jason Licht said. "We said we

would leave all options open for him should he reconsider his retirement and today's announcement is something we have been preparing for in recent days.

"Bruce and I have had plenty of conversations with Tom recently that led us to believe there was a realistic chance he would want to come back. Tom is the greatest quarterback of all time who is still playing at an elite level. With this decision now made, we will continue to move forward with our offseason plans to reload this roster for another championship run."

Brady is the NFL's career leader in yards passing (84,520) and TDs (624). He's the only player to win more than five Super Bowls and has been MVP of the game five times.

Brady has won three NFL MVP awards, been a first-team All-Pro three times and selected to the Pro Bowl 15 times. He is 243-73 in his career in the regular season and 35-12 in the playoffs.

He's back to build on all those numbers.

## NCAA MEN'S BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT FIELD SET

# March Madness brings back feel of the good ol' days

BY EDDIE PELLIS

AP National Writer

Any hoops fan hungering for a return to normal this March might have looked at the bracket when it finally came out and wondered what ever changed.

Gonzaga is the tournament's top seed. Kansas and Arizona are No. 1s, as well. Duke and Kentucky are right up there as No. 2s and the defending champion, Baylor, is the other top seed and a force to be reckoned with again, too.

But all that sameness felt like more of a celebration when the pairings were set this Selection Sunday, March 13. The most-anticipated reveal of the year felt like a party again, even if it might have been pushed down a notch on the ticker by the unexpected return of Tom Brady to the NFL in an

announcement that came just as Dick Vitale and Co., were starting to break down the 68-team draw.

"This was a really special year because we all realized what we missed," Villanova coach Jay Wright said.

For the first time since 2019, the teams will scatter across the country to eight cities for 48 games over the first four-day weekend of America's unofficial hoops holiday. Then, they will move to four cities for the Sweet 16. And they will cut down the nets in New Orleans, where the Final Four runs April 2-4.

It figures to be a much different atmosphere than in Indianapolis last year, where all 67 games were held in a makeshift bubble with limited fans. A year after COVID-19 scrubbed the event completely,

2021 offered a tournament that put the NCAA under the glare of the spotlight for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the inequities between the men's and women's events.

This year, the women's tournament is being branded as "March Madness," just like the men's. That bracket was revealed on Sunday, just like the men's. The No. 1 seeds in that one: South Carolina, Louisville, North Carolina State and Stanford.

As always, there was a decent-sized menu of snubs and oversights to debate. On the men's side, Xavier didn't make it despite four wins against teams that qualified for the 68-team field. Texas A&M made the final of the SEC Tournament but got snubbed, too. Among those making the cut were Michigan, despite 14

losses, and Indiana and Rutgers, which had 13 each.

The Big Ten got its fair share of love, with a nation-high nine teams, which made it surprising to some that the conference's tournament champion, Iowa, was stuck with a 5 seed.

Leading the Hawkeyes this year is Keegan Murray, a 23-point-per-game scorer who is one of the best inside-outside threats in the game.

Kansas guard Ochai Agbaji is something rare in college — a senior, and one who averages around 20 points and five rebounds a game and also plays great defense. He withdrew from the NBA draft last season and has led the Jayhawks to their first No. 1 seed since 2018.

Also, Kentucky's Oscar Tshiebwe, one of dozens

who switched schools via the amped-up transfer portal that is displaying a penchant for reshaping college hoops — and college sports — in the blink of an eye.

"It's all about staying in the moment and having more fun than anybody in the tournament," said Tshiebwe's coach, John Calipari.

The best way to have fun, of course, is winning it all. Baylor did that last year in a title-game romp over Gonzaga. Just like last year, both are No. 1 seeds again, with the Zags the 3-1 favorite to win the title, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Arizona was next at 6-1, followed by Kentucky (17-2) and Baylor (10-1).

"A great learning experience," Gonzaga's Drew Timme said on ESPN of last year's sec-

ond-place finish. "Obviously, things didn't go the way we wanted. But it allowed for a lot of self-growth for the program. We're excited for the challenge."

So many storylines in this tournament will revolve around Duke's Mike Krzyzewski. The 75-year-old coach is calling it quits after this season, his 42nd with the Blue Devils. He needs four wins to reach his 13th Final Four, but the road is not easy.

It could include a matchup with Tom Izzo and Michigan State in the second round, then a trip to San Francisco for a possible matchup with Gonzaga in the Elite Eight.

"It's the last time I'm going to be able to do this," Krzyzewski tweeted after the brackets came out, "and to be a No. 2 seed is terrific."

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