



# SUPER FLY

Planes fly over 25,000 fans at Raymond James stadium before Super Bowl 55 on Sunday in Tampa, Florida. Mark Humphrey/AP

## Column: Brady remains great in a season like no other

BY TIM DAHLBERG

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The stadium was full of cardboard cutouts and people in masks. A poet — yes, a poet — introduced us to some real heroes, and one of them handled the opening coin flip like she had done it 100 times before.

On the field a woman joined the crew in stripes for the first time in a Super Bowl. Even the commercials reminded us — at times somberly — that this was a season like no other in a time unlike any other.

Then Tom Brady took the field. And suddenly everything about the Super Bowl seemed normal once again.

There was Brady, playing pitch and catch with Rob Gronkowski like they were both still toiling in the snow in New England. There was Brady, calmly throwing for a score to end the first half that turned out to be more than enough for a Tampa Bay team that was determined not to let Patrick Mahomes spoil their hometown party.

And there was Brady, celebrating a fifth Super Bowl MVP award and hoisting the Lombardi trophy for the seventh time.

Did anyone outside of Kansas City doubt that this would be the way it would turn out? In a different uni-



Ashley Landis/AP

Tampa Bay Buccaneers tight end Rob Gronkowski, left, and quarterback Tom Brady celebrate after defeating the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl 55 on Sunday

form in a year where nothing else was even remotely as predictable?

Hardly, yet in a way it was oddly comforting to see. A season ending yet again with No. 12 sporting the biggest smile a 43-year-old can muster and hugging everyone in his path.

The greatest of all time was meant for just this time.

"I think we knew this was going to happen tonight, didn't we?" Brady asked his teammates in front of him at the trophy ceremony.

Maybe, but they probably weren't prepared for the way it did happen.

Brady was Brady, of course, and on

this night he was almost perfect. The game was pretty much decided in the first half, meaning there was no need for any last minute heroics, and the smothering Buccaneers defense did what no one expected by keeping Mahomes out of the end zone all game long.

He's had more exciting Super Bowl wins, sure. Indeed, Brady has had so many Super Bowl wins that the tendency is to try and rank them like they are not actually equal in value.

And even if Brady wasn't about to rate this one, he did acknowledge one thing: His team rose to the occasion

when it mattered most in a 31-9 win that was every bit as lopsided as the score indicated.

"We ended up playing our best game of the year," Brady said.

Credit for that doesn't just go to Brady, who simply needed to be good instead of spectacular on this night. The Tampa Bay defense chased Mahomes all over the field all night long, and Gronk came up big with two touchdown catches in the first half.

Bruce Arians did a masterful coaching job as well, joining Brady in the old-timer's club by becoming the oldest coach to win the Super Bowl at the age of 68 after spending a career on the sidelines in various capacities.

"I'd have to be smoking something really illegal to imagine something like this," Arians said.

It was Arians who called out his new quarterback early in the year for an uneven performance, and Arians who saw the potential for the team even as the Bucs struggled in November. They would go on to win their last eight games, including three on the road as a wild card before heading home to finish it off against the Chiefs.

"We knew we'd be tough once we got in," Arians said. "We just had to get in the playoffs."

Once in, Brady outplayed fu-

ture Hall of Famers Drew Brees and Aaron Rodgers — then spent the days before the Super Bowl urging his teammates to seize the moment against the Chiefs.

"He was texting us at 11 at night that we would win this game," running back Leonard Fournette said. "We believed in him."

Hard not to believe when No. 12 is on your team, no matter the uniform color. Brady didn't need any more validation about his place in the history of the game, but he got it anyway with a playoff run for the ages — and the aged.

He did what the greats all do, which is make the players around him better. No one wanted to be the player to let Brady down; no one wanted to get in the way of yet another Super Bowl ring.

"He is the greatest football player to ever play. I can tell my kids I played with that man," Fournette said. "I'm just blessed."

They're blessed in Tampa Bay, too, because Brady says he's coming back for at least one more year. So is Arians, and this coach-quarterback combination figures to be as good once again as the one Brady left in New England.

For now, though, Tom Brady is a Super Bowl champion once again. Just like normal.

### Brady wins 5th Super Bowl MVP award with vintage performance

Tom Brady took one final snap, went down on his knee, popped up and hugged his Tampa Bay Buccaneers teammates.

With that big, familiar smile. They were champions and Brady put together another vintage performance on football's biggest stage — doing everything his unquestioned greatness has forced the world to expect whenever he takes the field.

In whatever uniform or city he's in.

Brady was masterful. He was magnificent. He was the Super Bowl MVP.

Again. For the fifth time. At 43 years old.

"Being down here and experiencing it this with this group of guys, every year is amazing, and this team is world champions forever," Brady said. "You can't take that away from us, so thank you guys, thank you all."

After not throwing a touchdown pass in the first quarter of his previous nine Super Bowls, Brady eliminated that glitch on his resume with an 8-yard toss to Gronkowski — who came out of retirement for a moment like this — with 37 seconds left.

By going 16 of 20 in the first half, he also added a record to his mile-long list as the first player in Super Bowl history to complete 80% of his passes and throw for three touchdowns in any half.

This is all old hat to an ageless wonder with so many championship rings — now, seven of them. But this one was different from those others with Bill Belichick and the Patriots, with whom he already had established an unmatched legacy.

— Associated Press

### Super Bowl

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Despite playing at home, the Buccaneers weren't allowed to fire the cannons from their famed pirate ship after touchdowns and big plays. They did it soon after the clock expired as red, white and black confetti fell onto the field.

Fans still enjoyed the thud of Gronk's thunderous spike after his first score.

Tampa missed an opportunity to extend the lead when Brady's 2-yard pass to offensive lineman Joe Haeg was knocked out of his hands by Anthony Hitchens in the end zone. Ronald Jones was stopped short on consecutive carries as Arians stuck to his "No risk it, no biscuit" philosophy and went on fourth down.

But the Chiefs didn't gain any momentum off the stop. Instead, they made one costly mistake after another.

First, All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce dropped a pass that would've been a big gain on third down. Then punter Tommy Townsend shanked a 29-yarder after a penalty forced him to kick again. The Bucs started at Kansas City's 38 instead of their 27.

A holding call on Chiefs cornerback Charvarius Ward negated an interception by All-Pro safety Tyrann Mathieu. Kansas City's defense held but an offside penalty during Ryan Succop's successful field goal gave the Buccaneers a first down. Sarah Thomas, the first woman official in a Super Bowl, threw that flag.

Brady needed one play, firing a strike to Gronkowski for a 17-yard TD and a 14-3 lead. Gronk hesitated before spiking the ball, waiting to make sure the flag on the play was again against the Chiefs.

Mahomes drove the offense for a 34-yard field goal by Harrison Butker that cut it to 14-6, but Kansas City's defense fell apart in the final minute of the first half — allowing

#### Tampa Bay 31, Kansas City 9

Kansas City	3	3	3	0	—	9
Tampa Bay	7	14	10	0	—	31

First Quarter

KC—FG Butker 49, 5:10.

TB—Gronkowski 8 pass from Brady (Succop kick), :37.

Second Quarter

TB—Gronkowski 17 pass from Brady (Succop kick), 6:05.

KC—FG Butker 34, 1:01.

TB—Brown 1 pass from Brady (Succop kick), :06.

Third Quarter

KC—FG Butker 52, 11:26.

TB—Fournette 27 run (Succop kick), 7:45.

TB—FG Succop 52, 2:46.

A—24,835.

	KC	TB
First downs	22	26
Total Net Yards	350	340
Rushes-yards	17-107	33-145
Passing	243	195
Punt Returns	1-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns	3-87	3-75
Interceptions Ret.	0-0	2-0
Comp-Att-Int	26-49-2	21-29-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	3-27	1-6
Punts	3-35.7	4-37.5
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	11-120	4-39
Time of Possession	28:37	31:23

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

Rushing—Kansas City, Edwards-Helaire 9-64, Mahomes 5-33, Hill 1-5, Williams 2-5, Tampa Bay, Fournette 16-89, Jones 12-61, Brady 4-46, Brate 3-26, Godwin 2-9, Evans 1-31.

Passing—Kansas City, Mahomes 26-49-2-270. Tampa Bay, Brady 21-29-0-201.

Receiving—Kansas City, Kelce 10-133, Hill 7-73, Edwards-Helaire 2-23, Williams 2-10, Hardman 2-4, Watkins 1-13, Robinson 1-11, Pringle 1-3. Tampa Bay, Gronkowski 6-67, Brown 5-22, Fournette 4-46, Brate 3-26, Godwin 2-9, Evans 1-31.

Missed Field Goals—None.

42 yards on two pass interference penalties. One against Mathieu in the end zone set up Brady's TD pass to Brown for a 21-6 halftime lead.

It was Brady who convinced his new team to give Brown a chance after the troubled former All-Pro came off suspension. His TD toss to Brown was his 50th of the season, including 10 in the postseason.

Mathieu took an unsportsmanlike penalty after the TD pass for getting into it with Brady as he ran to the sideline.

Leonard Fournette, like Brown an in-season addition, ran 27 yards untouched for a touchdown in the third quarter, extending Tampa's lead to 28-9. Arians pumped his fist after that score and pointed toward offensive coordinator Byron Leftwich, who made the call.

Succop's 52-yard field goal in-

creased the lead to 31-9.

Last year, Mahomes rallied the Chiefs from a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter against San Francisco and earned MVP honors in leading Kansas City to its first NFL championship in a half-century. But Tampa's pass rush gave him no chance in this one.

Shaq Barrett had one of three sacks on Mahomes, who spent most of the game trying to escape Jason Pierre-Paul, William Gholston and a relentless group.

"There was nothing that was gonna stop us from winning this game," Barrett said. "I knew we were going to keep the pressure up. Coach Bowles had a great game plan. We had the guys up there to make it work and we made it work, baby."

Brady was 6-3 in Super Bowls during 20 seasons in New England before he signed a \$50 million, two-year contract with Tampa in March. The Buccaneers hadn't reached the playoffs since 2007 and hadn't won a postseason game since Jon Gruden led Tampa over Oakland in Super Bowl 37.

Despite the home-field advantage, it wasn't until Brady hooked up with Gronkowski for a 21-6 lead that fans chanted: "Let's Go Bucs!" They were roaring in the fourth quarter.

There were plenty of red-clad Chiefs fans doing the tomahawk chop for part of the first half until the Bucs made it a rout.

Brady avenged his loss against Chiefs defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo, who held the same position for the Giants when New York stifled the Patriots in the 2008 Super Bowl, preventing New England from a perfect season.

The warmer climate suited Brady perfectly. He passed Michael Jordan for more championships and it doesn't seem he's ready to slow down. He already said he might play past age 45,

### Chiefs lose composure and see red amid a sea of yellow in Super Bowl

Offsides. Unnecessary roughness. Unsportsmanlike conduct. Pass interference. And holding. Lots of holding.

All those penalties were too much even for Patrick Mahomes to overcome: Good as Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were Sunday — worthy champions, certainly — the Kansas City Chiefs put on a textbook display of how not to perform in a Super Bowl.

By halftime, the defending champs had amassed more penalties (8) than points (6) — and more frustration than hope. It was an undisciplined, uncharacteristic and somewhat unbelievable loss of composure that set the stage for a 31-9 drubbing at the hands of the Bucs that very few saw coming.

Kansas City's 95 penalty yards in the first half were the most by any team in the first half of any of the 269 regular-season and playoff games this season. They were one more yard than Kansas City had racked up in any single game all year. The Chiefs only committed three penalties in the second half to finish the game with 11 for 120 yards. It hardly counted as progress.

"It was uncharacteristic, and it was too bad it happened today," coach Andy Reid said.

The team that ran like a classy, unstoppable machine through one championship season, and over 16 more wins en route to their second straight title game, imploded on itself. The Chiefs got too handy in a vain attempt to cover Tampa Bay's receivers, too jumpy on the line of scrimmage, too chippy when things didn't go their way.

— Associated Press