



# LIII

## SUPER BOWL

# Patriots vs. Eagles

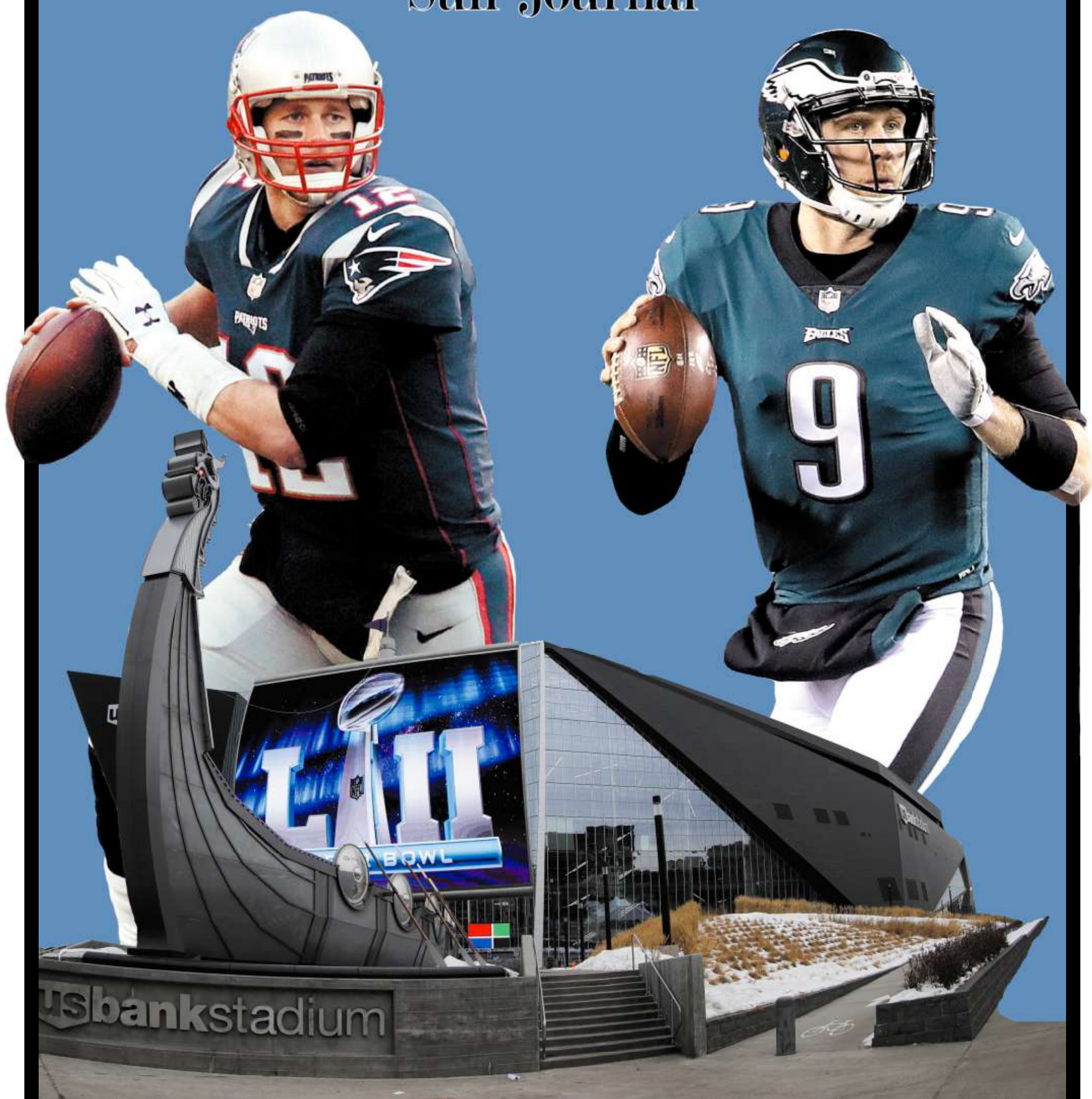
Sunday, February 4, 2018

U.S. Bank Stadium

Minneapolis, Minnesota

6:30 p.m. • NBC

Sun Journal



## Page 3

Wil Kramlich believes in the Patriots; Lee Horton makes the Eagles' case.

## Page 8

Sideline reporter Michele Tafoya ready for the spotlight — at home.

## Pages 4-5

One team was on a mission from the beginning. The other battled through a quarterback change after a strong start.

Take a look at the teams' journeys through the season, who they defeated, and to whom they lost.

## Pages 6-7

Full stats for each team, and a look back at previous Super Bowl rings.

## Page 9

Randy Whitehouse welcomes all haters, and revels in their sentiments.

# #SuperBowl

Follow along Sunday as Sun Journal staffers and contributors give you their takes on the big game. Accounts with Super Bowl content include @WilTalkSports, @RAWmaterial, @JPell915, @jrhockeywriter, @\_Lee\_H, and @oaksie72.





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WIL KRAMLICH

# Patriots will win because ...

## They hold the important ‘experienced roster’ card

Let’s get this straight. A second-year head coach and a second-string quarterback are not going to keep the New England Patriots from winning a second-consecutive Super Bowl. Not. Going. To. Happen. I mean, it could happen. But it won’t. I will give props to the Philadelphia Eagles. They were dominant enough in the regular season with Carson Wentz at quarterback that it allowed backup-turned-starter Nick Foles to use the final stretch of regular season after Wentz went down with an injury as a preseason of sorts. The defense was stout — and underrated, in my opinion — throughout the season, and all the new skill position players on offense have figured out their roles.

Yet the Eagles are underdogs — dog masks and all — for a reason. These Patriots are a better, if not perfect, team.

Their biggest advantages are the obvious ones. Bill Belichick is a better coach than Doug Pederson. While Pederson has shown in his short tenure that he has better clock management than his mentor, former Eagles coach and current Kansas City Chiefs coach Andy Reid, he is going up against arguably the greatest coach in the NFL history. Look at last year’s Super Bowl, the one against the Seahawks two years ago, and just look at two weeks ago against the Jaguars. Part of the reason the Patriots were able to come back in those games was Belichick’s knowledge of how much time he had left to rally and what it would take to do so.

That he had Tom Brady leading the charge on offense helps too.

Brady over Foles is another obvious advantage. Brady has been here before, and he’s won here before. While Foles looked good in the NFC Championship game, his track record is spotty. He was able to be successful on the deep ball, which is something that Belichick and defensive coordinator Matt Patricia usually game plan to prevent.

I won’t call the Patriots defense an advantage, because it isn’t. The Eagles have better personnel, specifically along the front. But the gap between the two units might not be as big as some fans think. This Patriots defense is unheralded, and doesn’t have a lot of big names. But it makes you work for every first down and every point. It will stymie your run game, and when you become one-dimensional and stick to passing the pressure of the pass rush will start to get to you.

Foles, please meet Trey Flowers, former Steeler James Harrison, and “I didn’t even know that guy was on the roster.”

While we’re talking about advantages, Stephen Gostkowski may give Patriots fans gray hairs with his kicking, but this will be his fifth Super Bowl, while the Eagles’ Jake Elliott is a rookie. And Patriots punter Ryan Allen might not have the biggest booming leg, but he’s been consistent and his punts rarely end in touchbacks. His Philly counterpart, Donnie Jones, is a career journeyman, and his best days were almost a decade ago.

The Patriots conceivably get the checkmarks in many categories when put head-to-head with what the Eagles have to offer. The biggest, and most obvious, checkmark in the Patriots’ favor is Super Bowl experience. The Eagles have just six active players who have played in the big game, including LeGarrette Blount and Chris Long with the Patriots last year. Blount also played in Super Bowl XLIX with the Patriots. New England, meanwhile, has 35 players with Super Bowl experience, which comes with the back-to-back and three-in-four-years trips.

Dealing with the emotions, the pressure and the distractions in and around the game can play a big role in winning it. Nobody has more experience in successfully “ignoring the noise” than Belichick and Brady, and the rest of the been-there, done-that Patriots fall in line behind them.

If the Patriots need any extra motivation to win another Super Bowl, there’s this: It could be the last chance to win a Super Bowl in the long and illustrious careers of Brady and Belichick, and the end of what might be the best dynasty the NFL has ever seen. The Patriots can’t think “oh, we’ll just be back next year.” And they won’t think that way.

Belichick, Brady, Bob — er, Rob — Rob Gronkowski and all the players the most casual fans can’t name will be going all in on this game. And they’re not about to let what might be their last chance at a win end in a loss.

LEE HORTON

# Eagles will win because ...

## They play the role of the underdog oh, so perfectly

The quarterback wearing No. 11 went down for the season, but somehow a little-known backup and an unheralded coach led their team to the franchise’s third Super Bowl appearance. In the big game, they were underdogs against an unstoppable force. No Drew Bledsoe? No problem. Tom Brady and Bill Belichick pulled off the upset over the Rams — nicknamed the Greatest Show on Turf — to earn the New England Patriots’ first Super Bowl title. It was one of the best sports moments of my life.

Sixteen years later, Nick Foles and Doug Pederson will help the Philadelphia Eagles do the same thing to the mighty Patriots in Super Bowl LIII.

No Carson Wentz? No problem.

It’s not the same thing, you might be saying.

But it’s exactly the same thing. Or, at least, it’s enough to not count them out Sunday in Minnesota.

This Super Bowl also has similarities to Super Bowl XLII. Remember that one, back in Feb. 2008? The New York Giants used a superb defensive line to derail the Patriots’ not-quite-perfect season.

The Eagles, too, have an outstanding defensive line, which will be facing an offensive line that none of us has much confidence in.

Therefore, Brady will probably need to make some quick decisions against one of the NFL’s best defenses at forcing turnovers. During the regular season, Philadelphia forced 31 turnovers — nearly two per game. They intercepted 19 passes, which is more than one per game.

Philly’s offense doesn’t quite measure up to New England’s, but it’s still one of the league’s most formidable.

The Eagles in the regular season were third in points scored, one point behind the second-ranked Patriots. Philly’s overall yardage ranks second, but it has balance, including the NFL’s third-best running attack. That should take some of the pressure off Foles to be productive on every single down.

You know who else had a good running game? The Jacksonville Jaguars, who ranked No. 1 in the regular season, and whom the Patriots barely beat in the AFC Championship.

A friend of mine, who is a Patriots fan, told me last week that he thinks this is the worst Patriots Super Bowl team of this century.

That argument can easily be made, and that belief is especially dangerous to the Patriots because they haven’t been a great Super Bowl team.

During most of the 1990s, the Super Bowl was a joke. Pretty much every game was a blowout and there was hardly any excitement.

Fortunately, blowouts haven’t been a problem when New England has been involved.

Over the past 17 years, this is the eighth time that the Brady-Belichick Era Patriots have played in a Super Bowl. Last year’s six-point win over the Falcons was their largest point differential out of the first seven trips — and that game went to overtime.

Many of our fellow Americans are sick of the Patriots going to the Super Bowl. Not me, because they usually don’t play all that well and so we’re pretty much guaranteed a good game.

I said this same thing last year, and I was right. New England bombed in the first half. If the Falcons made a couple of different play calls late in that game, they’d have a Vince Lombardi in the trophy case at their fancy new stadium.

Don’t expect the Eagles to make the same mistake as the Falcons and Jaguars. Pederson, in only his second year as Philadelphia’s coach, has earned a reputation as a risk-taker. If the Eagles take a 28-3 lead, their focus will be on adding seven more rather than on holding onto a 25-point lead.

One other thing: Pederson is 1-0 against the Patriots in the Super Bowl. He was Brett Favre’s backup on Jan. 26, 1997, when Green Bay beat New England 35-21 in Super Bowl XXXI.

Speaking of backups, they have a pretty good track record in Super Bowls. Jeff Hostetler, as Phil Simms backup, led the Giants to a Super Bowl win over the Bills. Doug Williams, Trent Dilfer, Jim Plunkett join Brady as quarterbacks who started seasons as backups but ended up guiding their teams to Super Bowl victories.

Nick Foles is the key player in Super Bowl LIII. If he plays well, the Eagles will win by double digits. If he struggles, Philly still has enough to pull off a close win over the Patriots.

### Philadelphia Eagles vs. New England Patriots

U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis  
Sunday, 6:30 p.m. EST • NBC

13-3 • 2-0

Total yards (avg.)

Regular season: 365.8

233.6

132.2

Passing

Rushing

Postseason: 395.0

292.0

103.0

First downs

Regular season: 338

108

193

37

Rushing

Passing

Penalty

Postseason: 49

15

3

31



OFFENSE

13-3 • 2-0

Total yards (avg.)

Regular season: 394.2

276.1

118.1

Passing

Rushing

Postseason: 391.0

317.5

73.5

First downs

Regular season: 389

107

232

50

Rushing

Passing

Penalty

Postseason: 53

11

6

36



<b>Yards allowed (avg.)</b>		<b>Yards allowed (avg.)</b>	
Regular season: 306.5		Regular season: 366.0	
<b>227.3</b>	<b>79.2</b>	<b>251.2</b>	<b>114.8</b>
Passing	Rushing	Passing	Rushing
Postseason: 307.0		Postseason: 320.5	
<b>229.0</b>	<b>78.0</b>	<b>237.5</b>	<b>83.0</b>

<b>SCORING (PPG)</b>		<b>SCORING (PPG)</b>	
Regular season		Regular season	
<b>28.6</b> Points for		<b>28.6</b> Points for	
<b>18.4</b> Points allowed		<b>18.5</b> Points allowed	
Postseason		Postseason	
<b>26.5</b> Points for		<b>29.5</b> Points for	
<b>8.5</b> Points allowed		<b>17.0</b> Points allowed	

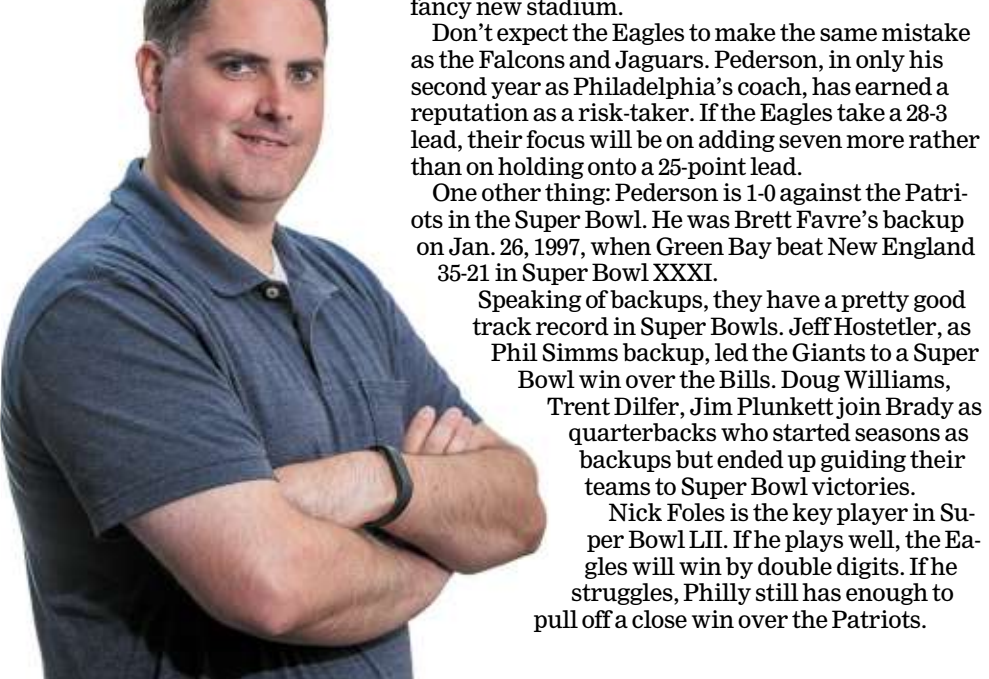
<b>PLAY SELECTION (PCT.)</b>		<b>PLAY SELECTION (PCT.)</b>	
Regular season	Postseason	Regular season	Postseason
PASS RUSH	PASS RUSH	PASS RUSH	PASS RUSH
<b>54.4</b> <b>45.6</b>	<b>50.4</b> <b>49.6</b>	<b>56.7</b> <b>43.3</b>	<b>66.7</b> <b>33.3</b>

SOURCE: National Football League

AP



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# How the Patriots got here



# How the Eagles got here

## GAME 1

### CHIEFS 42, PATRIOTS 27

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Alex Smith threw two long touchdown passes and rookie Kareem Hunt, after fumbling on his first NFL carry, scored three times as Kansas City stunned New England 42-27 in the season opener. Coming off their sensational Super Bowl rally to a fifth Lombardi Trophy, the Patriots faded badly in the second half. It was the first time the Patriots lost at Gillette Stadium when leading at halftime, a span of 82 games.

Tyreek Hill scored on a 75-yarder and Hunt put the Chiefs in front with a 78-yarder to punctuate Kansas City's charge after trailing 17-14 at halftime.

## GAME 2

### PATRIOTS 36, SAINTS 20

NEW ORLEANS — Bouncing back with a vengeance from a season-opening loss, Tom Brady threw three touchdown passes in the first quarter for the first time in his career and eclipsed 300 yards passing in the first half for only the second time.

Brady's maiden Super Bowl triumph in the Superdome back in February 2002 is bound to be one of his fondest memories. But the 18-year veteran looked like a superior QB in his latest visit. He finished 30 of 39 for 447 yards without an interception — at least not one that counted. Saints defenders caught Brady's passes twice, but both plays were wiped out by New Orleans penalties.

## GAME 3

### PATRIOTS 36, TEXANS 33

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady connected with Brandin Cooks for a 25-yard touchdown pass with 23 seconds left, his fifth TD throw of the game.

Brady finished 25 of 35 for 378 yards as New England won its fifth straight regular-season meeting with Houston and seventh of eight overall. Cooks caught five passes for 131 yards and pair of scores. It was the fifth multi-touchdown game and eighth 100-yard game of his career.

Texans rookie Deshaun Watson was strong in his second career start. The Patriots were thin on the edge without linebacker Dont'a Hightower for the second straight week, and Watson took advantage, completing 22 of 33 passes for 301 yards and two touchdowns.

## GAME 4

### PANTHERS 33, PATRIOTS 30

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Graham Gano hit a 48-yard field goal as time expired, and the Carolina Panthers stunned the New England Patriots 33-30.

The winner served as redemption for Gano, who missed an extra point in the third quarter.

## GAME 5

### PATRIOTS 19, BUCS 14

TAMPA, Fla. — Tom Brady threw for 303 yards and one touchdown, and New England's porous defense showed signs of improvement in a 19-14 victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

The Super Bowl champions rebounded from a last-second loss to Carolina, despite Brady turning the ball over twice — on his first interception in eight regular-season games and a fumble on one of Tampa Bay's three sacks.

## GAME 6

### PATRIOTS 24, JETS 17

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Tom Brady set the NFL record for regular-season victories by a quarterback, getting his 187th and brkeaking a tie with Peyton Manning and Brett Favre for the record.

The Patriots were playing their first game in 10 days and fell behind 14-0 in the second quarter against the surprising Jets.

## GAME 7

### PATRIOTS 23, FALCONS 7

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady threw two touchdown passes and New England toyed with Atlanta Falcons for a 23-7 win in a fog-filled Super Bowl rematch that wasn't particularly super. New England scored the final 31 points to win the NFL championship in February.

## GAME 8

### PATRIOTS 21, CHARGERS 13

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady passed for 333 yards and a touchdown for New England, and Stephen Gostkowski added four field goals.

It was the fourth straight victory for the Patriots (6-2). The loss snapped a three-game win streak for the Chargers.

## GAME 9

### PATRIOTS 41, BRONCOS 16

DENVER — Tom Brady threw three touchdown passes and New England matched its own AFC record with its 12th consecutive road victory, pummeling the Denver Broncos 41-16.

Avoiding Von Miller all night and throwing for 266 yards on 25-of-34 passing, Brady improved to 8-9 against the Broncos, the only team he has a losing record against, and won for just the fourth time in 11 trips to Denver.

## GAME 10

### PATRIOTS 33, RAIDERS 8

MEXICO CITY — Tom Brady felt right at home in his first appearance in Mexico by throwing for 339 yards and three touchdowns, to the delight of an adoring crowd, in New England's 33-8 victory over Oakland.

Brady completed his first 12 passes and picked apart Oakland's suspect defense to chants of "Brady! Brady!" from an amped-up crowd at Azteca Stadium.

## GAME 11

### PATRIOTS 35, DOLPHINS 17

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady tossed four touchdown passes



JUSTIN PELLETIER/SUN JOURNAL GRAPHIC

## GAME 16

### PATRIOTS 26, JETS 6

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Dion Lewis ran for a touchdown and caught a scoring pass, helping the Patriots clinch home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs.

The win clinched the seventh 13-win season for the Patriots (13-3), second in NFL history to San Francisco's nine seasons. It was also Bill Belichick's 250th career regular-season win, moving him into a tie with Tom Landry for third all-time among head coaches.

## DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

### PATRIOTS 35, TITANS 6

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady passed for three touchdowns and 337 yards, and New England cruised past Tennessee 35-14 to advance to their seventh consecutive AFC championship game.

It was Brady's 10th career postseason game with at least three TD tosses, moving him past Joe Montana for the most in NFL history. James White caught a touchdown pass and ran for another, and Danny Amendola had 11 catches for 112 yards.

The Titans (10-8) took an early 7-0 lead, but New England scored 35 straight points to take control.

Marcus Mariota completed 22 of 37 passes for 254 yards and two touchdowns, but was under duress for most of the second half. He was sacked eight times, a Patriots playoff record.

New England also held Derrick Henry to just 28 yards rushing on 12 carries.

## AFC CHAMPIONSHIP

### PATRIOTS 24, JAGUARS 20

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady shook off a hand injury and threw a 4-yard touchdown pass to Danny Amendola with 2:48 remaining, rallying the New England Patriots back to the Super Bowl with a 24-20 comeback victory over the Jacksonville Jaguars in the AFC championship.

Brady, wearing a black bandage on his right hand, showed no signs of being hampered. And, with the game — and possibly the season — on the line, the Patriots star came up big again.

Brady finished 26 of 38 for 290 yards and two touchdowns for the Patriots (15-3). The Jaguars led 20-10 early in the fourth quarter, but couldn't hold against the defending champions.

## GAME 16

### COWBOYS 6, EAGLES 0

PHILADELPHIA — Dak Prescott tossed a 20-yard touchdown pass to Brice Butler early in the fourth quarter and the Cowboys beat playoff-bound Philadelphia, preventing the Eagles from earning a franchise-record 14th win.

The Eagles (13-3) rested several starters on a frigid day and played others briefly after securing the NFC's No. 1 seed last week.

## DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

### EAGLES 15, FALCONS 10

PHILADELPHIA — With Nick Foles engineering several long drives, Jake Elliott converting three field goals, and the defense getting stingy in the tightest spot, Philadelphia moved into the NFC championship game with a victory over Atlanta.

Foles directed brilliant marches of 74 and 80 yards in the second half — one into the whipping wind, the other with it — and Elliott atoned for missing an extra point by converting from 53 yards at the end of the second quarter, 37 and 21 in the second half.

Then, the Eagles held when Atlanta got to the 9-yard line with a first down, and to the 2 on fourth down.

When Matt Ryan's final pass sailed over Julio Jones' head in the end zone, Philly could celebrate its first playoff victory since the 2008 season.

## NFC CHAMPIONSHIP

### EAGLES 38, VIKINGS 7

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Nick Foles threw for three touchdowns and Philadelphia made big play after big play, winning the NFC title in a stunning 38-7 rout of Minnesota.

Foles was on fire, throwing for 352 yards in a performance that might make the Philadelphia faithful miss injured Carson Wentz a whole lot less.

Patrick Robinson's spectacular 50-yard interception return got Philadelphia started.

Then Foles and his offense tore up the league's stingiest scoring defense, with long TD throws Alshon Jeffery and Torrey Smith.

LeGarrette Blount had an 11-yard scoring run when things were decided in the first half, and the Eagles were headed to an NFL title game the Vikings hoped to be in at their own stadium.

## GAME 1

### EAGLES 30, REDSKINS 17

LANDOVER, Md. — Carson Wentz threw for 307 yards and two touchdowns as the second-year quarterback guided Philadelphia to a 30-17 victory over the Washington Redskins in a sloppy, mistake-filled season opener between the NFC East rivals.

Wentz was 26 of 39 and threw an interception that Ryan Kerrigan returned for a touchdown. But Wentz made fewer errors than Washington's Kirk Cousins, who was picked off at the goal line and fumbled twice.

## GAME 2

### CHIEFS 27, EAGLES 20

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Chiefs rookie Kareem Hunt reached the end zone twice, Travis Kelce took a shovel pass 15 yards for the go-ahead touchdown and Kansas City held on. Kelce's touchdown catch with 6:25 left and Hunt's second TD scamper appeared to have put the game away.

## GAME 3

### EAGLES 27, GIANTS 24

PHILADELPHIA — Jake Elliott kicked a 61-yard field goal as the clock expired.

Eli Manning threw three touchdown passes in the fourth quarter, including a 77-yard score to Sterling Shepard, but Philadelphia rallied twice.

Carson Wentz tossed a 19-yard pass to Alshon Jeffery to set up Elliott's kick. The rookie was a fifth-round pick by the Bengals and joined the Eagles after Caleb Sturgis was injured in Week 1.

## GAME 4

### EAGLES 26, CHARGERS 24

CARSON, Calif. — Carson Wentz passed for 242 yards, LeGarrette Blount rushed for 136 and the Eagles extended their promising start to the season.

Rookie Jake Elliott kicked four field goals for the Eagles, who had thousands of roaring fans in the Chargers' temporary stadium while they hung on to win on the road for the second time in 10 tries.

## GAME 5

### EAGLES 34, CARDINALS 7

PHILADELPHIA — Carson Wentz threw a career-best four touchdown passes and the Eagles continued their impressive start.

Wentz tossed three scoring passes in the first quarter, including 59 yards to Torrey Smith, 11 yards to Zach Ertz and 15 yards to Trey Burton. He connected with Nelson Agholor for a 72-yard TD in the third quarter that left six-time Pro Bowl cornerback Patrick Peterson shouting on the sideline.

## GAME 6

### EAGLES 28, PANTHERS 23

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Carson Wentz threw for 222 yards and three touchdowns to help the Eagles beat Carolina 28-23 to improve to an NFC-best 5-1.

The Eagles turned two interceptions deep in Carolina territory into 15 points, with touchdown passes to Zach Ertz, and LeGarrette Blount's 2-point conversion to take an 18-10 lead in the third quarter. Wentz added a 24-yard scoring pass to Nelson Agholor in the fourth quarter.

## GAME 7

### EAGLES 34, REDSKINS 24

PHILADELPHIA — Carson Wentz tossed four touchdown passes and ran for a career-best 63 yards, helping the Eagles overcome losing nine-time Pro Bowl left tackle Jason Peters in a 34-24 win over Washington. Linebacker Jordan Hicks also went down with an ankle injury.

The second-year quarterback made one highlight play after another in front of a national audience. Wentz has led the NFL-best Eagles (6-1) to five straight wins.

## GAME 8

### EAGLES 33, 49ERS 10

PHILADELPHIA — Carson Wentz tossed two touchdown passes, Jalen Mills had a pick-6 and the NFL-leading Eagles beat the winless San Francisco 33-10 on a sloppy, rainy day.

The Eagles overcame a slow start on their way to a sixth straight win. The 49ers are 0-8 for the first time in franchise history.

## GAME 9

### EAGLES 51, BRONCOS 23

PHILADELPHIA — Carson Wentz tossed four touchdown passes, Corey Clement had three scores, and Philadelphia routed Denver 51-23.

The Eagles (8-1) dismantled the league's top-ranked defense, racking up 419 yards, to win their seventh straight game and head into a bye week with the best record in the NFL.

Brock Osweiler couldn't get the Broncos (3-5) on track in his first start since rejoining the team in September. He threw two interceptions.

## GAME 10

### EAGLES 37, COWBOYS 9

ARLINGTON, Texas — Carson Wentz threw for two touchdowns and three 2-point conversions after Philadelphia lost kicker Jake Elliott to a head injury, and the Eagles all but wrapped up the NFC East with the victory over Dallas.

The Eagles outscored the Cowboys 30-0 in the second half while extending their winning streak to eight games, their longest since 2003-04 and tied with New Orleans for the best current run in the NFL.

## GAME 11

### EAGLES 31, BEARS 3

PHILADELPHIA — Carson Wentz tossed three touchdown passes and the NFL-leading Eagles beat the Chicago Bears 31-3 for their ninth straight win.

The Eagles reduced their magic number to clinch the NFC East to one with their fourth consecutive win by at least 23 points and third in a row by exactly 28.





# Super bling

Super Bowl rings are given to winning players, coaches and staff of the league’s championship game. The Pittsburgh Steelers have accumulated the most hardware with six (1974-75, 1978-79, 2005 and 2008). The New England Patriots with five, are looking to equal that record in Super Bowl LII.



SUPER BOWL I  
GREEN BAY PACKERS

SUPER BOWL II  
GREEN BAY PACKERS



SUPER BOWL III  
NEW YORK JETS

SUPER BOWL IV  
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

SUPER BOWL V  
BALTIMORE COLTS

SUPER BOWL VI  
DALLAS COWBOYS

SUPER BOWL VII  
MIAMI DOLPHINS

SUPER BOWL VIII  
MIAMI DOLPHINS

SUPER BOWL IX  
PITTSBURGH STEELERS



SUPER BOWL X  
PITTSBURGH STEELERS

SUPER BOWL XI  
OAKLAND RAIDERS

SUPER BOWL XII  
DALLAS COWBOYS

SUPER BOWL XIII  
PITTSBURGH STEELERS

SUPER BOWL XIV  
PITTSBURGH STEELERS

SUPER BOWL XV  
OAKLAND RAIDERS

SUPER BOWL XVI  
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS



SUPER BOWL XVII  
WASHINGTON REDSKINS

SUPER BOWL XVIII  
LOS ANGELES RAIDERS

SUPER BOWL XIX  
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

SUPER BOWL XX  
CHICAGO BEARS

SUPER BOWL XXI  
NEW YORK GIANTS

SUPER BOWL XXII  
WASHINGTON REDSKINS

SUPER BOWL XXIII  
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS



SUPER BOWL XXIV  
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

SUPER BOWL XXV  
NEW YORK GIANTS

SUPER BOWL XXVI  
WASHINGTON REDSKINS

SUPER BOWL XXVII  
DALLAS COWBOYS

SUPER BOWL XXVIII  
DALLAS COWBOYS

SUPER BOWL XXIX  
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

SUPER BOWL XXX  
DALLAS COWBOYS



SUPER BOWL XXXI  
GREEN BAY PACKERS

SUPER BOWL XXXII  
DENVER BRONCOS

SUPER BOWL XXXIII  
DENVER BRONCOS

SUPER BOWL XXXIV  
ST. LOUIS RAMS

SUPER BOWL XXXV  
BALTIMORE RAVENS

SUPER BOWL XXXVI  
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

SUPER BOWL XXXVII  
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS



SUPER BOWL XXXVIII  
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

SUPER BOWL XXXIX  
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

SUPER BOWL XL  
PITTSBURGH STEELERS

SUPER BOWL XLI  
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

SUPER BOWL XLII  
NEW YORK GIANTS

SUPER BOWL XLIII  
PITTSBURGH STEELERS

SUPER BOWL XLIV  
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS



SUPER BOWL XLV  
GREEN BAY PACKERS

SUPER BOWL XLVI  
NEW YORK GIANTS

SUPER BOWL XLVII  
BALTIMORE RAVENS

SUPER BOWL XLVIII  
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

SUPER BOWL XLIX  
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

SUPER BOWL XL  
DENVER BRONCOS

SUPER BOWL XLI  
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

SOURCE: National Football League

AP

## Staff picks

**JUSTIN PELLETIER**  
Patriots, 27-24

**LEE HORTON**  
Eagles, 31-21

**TONY BLASI**  
Patriots, 36-14

**RANDY WHITEHOUSE**  
Patriots, 31-27

**WIL KRAMLICH**  
Patriots, 26-24

**NATE FOURNIER**  
Patriots, 31-26

**ADAM ROBINSON**  
Patriots, 27-14

**PHIL WHIPPLE**  
Patriots, 28-14

**MIKE MARCOTTE**  
Patriots, 34-28

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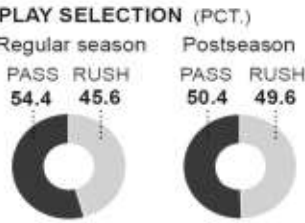
**EAGLES**  
13-3 • 2-0

**OFFENSE**

Total yards (avg.)	
Regular season: 365.6	
233.6	132.2
Passing	Rushing
Postseason: 395.0	
292.0	103.0
First downs	
Regular season: 338	
108	193
Rushing	Passing
Penalty	
Postseason: 49	
15	31

**DEFENSE**

Yards allowed (avg.)	
Regular season: 306.5	
227.3	79.2
Passing	Rushing
Postseason: 307.0	
229.0	78.0
SCORING (PPG)	
Regular season	
28.6	Points for
18.4	Points allowed
Postseason	
26.5	Points for
8.5	Points allowed



**COACHES CORNER**

**Doug Pederson**  
Philly was in attack mode from the outset against the Vikings, and that's a good reflection of Pederson and his staff. Pederson knows he can't back off against the Pats, and defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz is known for being aggressive.

**Career record: 22-12 .647**

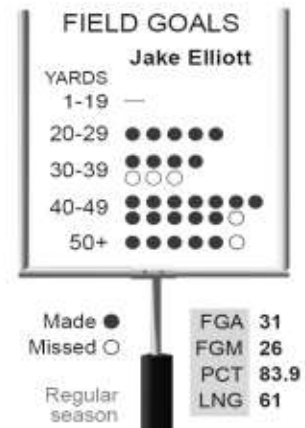
Reg. season	Postseason
W L PCT	W L PCT
20 12 .625	2 0 1.000

**All aboard the Jay Train**

Acquired from Miami at the trade deadline. Became first player in NFL history to produce at least 400 rushing yards with two teams (465 yards, Miami, 408 yards, Philadelphia) in the same season.

**RUSHING**

Regular season (Mia./Phi.)				
ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
208	873	4.2	71	1
Postseason				
33	127	3.8	16	0



**Nick has the neck**

**FOLES STATS**  
Pass yds: 537 (reg.) • 598 (postseason)  
TDs: 5 (reg.) • 3 (postseason)



Eagles look to thwart Patriots shot at a record sixth championship in a ...

# Super showdown

Tom Brady and the New England Patriots will try to match the Pittsburgh Steelers' six Super Bowl trophies when they face the Eagles in Minneapolis. They'll face a Philadelphia Eagles team looking for their first Lombardi Trophy.

Nick Foles, the backup QB who was thrust into the starting role when Carson Wentz blew out his left knee last month, led the Eagles to a 38-7 rout of the Minnesota Vikings in the NFC championship game.

The Eagles, who last won an NFL title in 1960, several years before the first Super Bowl, met the Patriots in the Super Bowl after the 2004 season with New England prevailing 24-21. It's the eighth Super Bowl appearance for Brady and coach Bill Belichick, who have won five times — including last year's 34-28 overtime rally against the Atlanta Falcons.

The Patriots clearly have the edge when it comes to experience — 32 players have a combined 60 games in the title game. The Eagles have just seven players on the active roster who've won a Super Bowl. The Patriots believe what's important is this: Philadelphia is playing its best football.

U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis • Sunday • 6:30 p.m. EST (NBC)

**PATRIOTS**

**PROJECTED STARTERS**

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

**OFFENSE**

D. Lewis 33 • RB, T. Brady 12 • QB, J. White 28 • RB, R. Gronkowski 87 • TE, C. Hogan 15 • WR, C. Fleming 71 • RT, S. Mason 69 • RG, D. Andrews 60 • C, J. Thuney 62 • LG, N. Solder 77 • LT, V. Curry 75 • DE, T. Jernigan 93 • DT, F. Cox 91 • DT, B. Graham 55 • DE, J. Mills 31 • CB, M. Kendricks 95 • LB, D. Ellerbe 57 • LB, N. Bradham 53 • LB, R. Darby 41 • CB, R. McLeod 23 • S, M. Jenkins 27 • S

**DEFENSE**

**WHEN PATRIOTS HAVE THE BALL**

Never mind that Brady is 40, he's playing as if he's in his prime and will test Philadelphia's versatile defense from the outset. If the Eagles don't bring pressure, he will pick them apart. Philly must be alert not only for all of Brady's targets — WRs Brandon Cooks, Danny Amendola, Chris Hogan, RBs James White and Dion Lewis — but for Lewis and White in the running game. Both are shifty and flexible and have Brady's trust. Perhaps most critical among all matchups is All-Pro TE Rob Gronkowski, who exited the AFC title game following a concussion. His confrontations with veteran S Malcolm Jenkins could be telling.



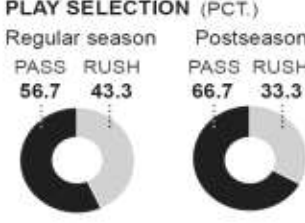
**PATRIOTS**  
13-3 • 2-0

**OFFENSE**

Total yards (avg.)	
Regular season: 394.2	
276.1	118.1
Passing	Rushing
Postseason: 391.0	
317.5	73.5
First downs	
Regular season: 389	
107	232
Rushing	Passing
Penalty	
Postseason: 53	
11	36

**DEFENSE**

Yards allowed (avg.)	
Regular season: 366.0	
251.2	114.8
Passing	Rushing
Postseason: 320.5	
237.5	83.0
SCORING (PPG)	
Regular season	
28.6	Points for
18.5	Points allowed
Postseason	
29.5	Points for
17.0	Points allowed



**COACHES CORNER**

**Bill Belichick**  
One win away from a sixth Super Bowl title with the Patriots. Has shaped the roster in New England to build the strongest dynasty in the history of the NFL.

**Career record: 278-128 .685**

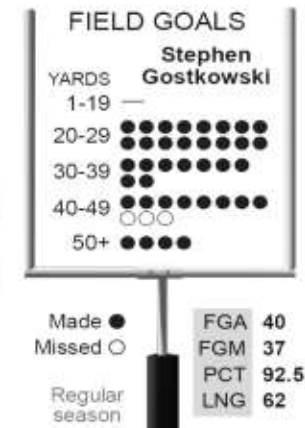
Reg. season	Postseason
W L PCT	W L PCT
250 118 .679	28 10 .737

**Carrying the load**

Emerged as one of the most reliable playmakers in the league over the back half of the season, carving out his role as New England's backfield leader. Also, the only player in this game to have returned a kickoff for a TD this season. Ranked fourth in the NFL with 24.8 yards per return.

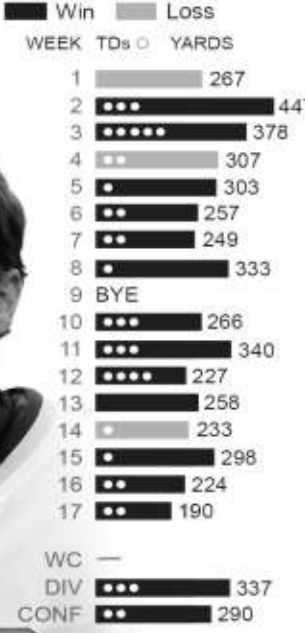
**RUSHING**

Regular season				
ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
180	896	5.0	44	6
Postseason				
24	96	4.0	18	0



**Battle tested**

**BRADY'S STATS**  
Pass yds: 4,577 (reg.) • 627 (post)  
TDs: 32 (reg.) • 5 (post)



**EAGLES**

**PROJECTED STARTERS**

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

**OFFENSE**

N. Agholor 13 • WR, N. Foles 9 • QB, J. Ajayi 36 • RB, Z. Ertz 86 • TE, A. Jeffery 17 • WR, L. Johnson 65 • RT, B. Brooks 79 • RG, J. Kelce 62 • C, S. Wisniewski 61 • LG, H. Vaitai 72 • LT, T. Smith 82 • WR, E. Lee 55 • LDE, L. Guy 93 • DT, M. Brown 90 • DT, S. Gilmore 24 • RCB, M. Butler 21 • LCB, E. Roberts 52 • LB, K. Van Noy 53 • LB, J. Harrison 92 • LB, P. Chung 23 • S, D. McCourty 32 • S

**DEFENSE**

**WHEN EAGLES HAVE THE BALL**

The Patriots must be wary of a balanced offense that tore apart Minnesota, which has a better overall defense than New England. Foles will try to get TE Zach Ertz involved early; he was unstoppable for the Vikings. Wideout Alshon Jeffery is a clear target with excellent hands and the ability to get open all over the field, freeing up Nelson Agholor and veteran Torrey Smith. The Eagles will try to keep New England's offense on the sideline, and create space for RBs Jay Ajayi, former Patriot LeGarrette Blount and rookie Corey Clement. New England LB Kyle Van Noy figures to have a busy day unless Philly falls behind.

**Go-to guys**

Favorite targets of Foles and Brady

Zach Ertz TE	Nelson Agholor WR	Alshon Jeffery WR	Danny Amendola WR	Brandin Cooks WR	Rob Gronkowski TE
74	62	57	61	65	69

RECEPTIONS Regular season

**Passes by field position**

REGULAR SEASON					
FOLES			BRADY		
Pct	Comp	Att	Yard line	Att	Comp
60.0	15	25	OPP 19-1	102	66
74.0	37	50	OPP 49-20	194	131
57.1	8	14	OWN 1-20	84	58
61.3	46	75	OWN 21-50	292	191

**Nick Foles**  
Forget about Foles being a backup quarterback; his post-season performances, particularly in the NFC title game, have been strong.

**Tom Brady**  
Has won five Super Bowls, four times as game MVP. Led the NFL with 4,577 passing yards. Will be making his 37th postseason start.





# Tafoya ready for some time in the spotlight

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. (AP) — Michele Tafoya was a 28-year-old sports talk radio host in the heart of college basketball country, embarking on a long-desired vocation in an unforgiving field when she felt her first career boost from a bold on-air prediction.

Cal will beat Duke.

That's what Tafoya told her listeners that defining March day in 1993 on WAQS-AM in Charlotte, North Carolina, a place with an abundance of ardent NCAA Tournament followers and, naturally, self-appointed experts.

The Blue Devils were the two-time defending national champions and an established power from a haven state of hoops.

The Golden Bears, despite the presence of star point guard Jason Kidd and a no-slouch No. 6 seed in the Midwest Region, had no such pedigree. They also happened to be the team from Tafoya's alma mater, prompting predictable howls of foolish bias.

Well, guess who won that second-round game?

Cal 82, Duke 77, was the final score. Apologies were the star of the show the following day.

"I give the fans credit. They all called in. The phones were lit for hours. Everybody was saying, 'We're sorry we doubted you. Clearly, you knew what you were talking about. You weren't picking with your heart,'" Tafoya said. "My stature as a person with some knowledge shot up that day in a 24-hour period."



Michele Tafoya, sideline reporter for NBC Sunday Night Football, works from her home studio in Edina, Minn., on the morning radio show last week.

Making sure she knows what she's talking about has been the driving force behind Tafoya's rise to sideline reporter for the NFL's showcase Sunday night games on NBC.

She'll work her fourth Super Bowl on Sunday in Minnesota, where this Southern

California native first moved in 1994 for a job with KFAN-AM as a sports talk host and Vikings sideline reporter.

She continues to call the Twin Cities area home, with her husband, Mark, 12-year-old son, Tyler, and 9-year-old daughter, Olivia.

"She usually knows more than what's go-

ing on more than we do, because she talks with so many different players through the course of the week," NBC analyst Cris Collinsworth said.

"You can tell the respect level that the players have and the coaches have for her. It's a difficult job."

Asking questions of coaches and players in real time on the field amid the intense NFL atmosphere with millions of viewers critiquing word choice, speaking style and wardrobe is a daunting assignment.

As is working in the professional sports environment as a woman, a glass ceiling that Tafoya has helped smash with predecessors such as Lesley Visser and contemporaries such as Suzy Kolber.

"I don't think I have to fight it anymore. I've been doing this long enough. I'm old now," Tafoya said Wednesday at the Mall of America, the media headquarters for Super Bowl week.

"You do this long enough, and people start to trust you. It was tough for quite a while the first few years, but that's why I always felt like I had to prepare like crazy."

Tafoya has been doing promotional work for Secret deodorant, with a campaign spotlighting women in the football world who've overcome the catcalls, prejudice and machismo to stand out in the field.

"I've never been one of those 'I am woman, hear me roar' kind of people. I'm more about being a professional. I'm going to do my job. I'm going to do it to the best of my ability," she said. "I don't care if you're a man or a woman."

SUPER BOWL LII • FEB. 4, 2018 • KICKOFF: 6:30 P.M. EASTERN



TOM BRADY HAS A CHANCE

to set the record for most Super Bowl wins when the New England Patriots play the Philadelphia Eagles at U.S. Bank Field in Minneapolis.

Brady and Hall of Fame defensive lineman Charles Haley are the only players on five Super Bowl winning teams. Haley won two rings with the 49ers and three more with the Cowboys.

Brady has won all five of his titles with coach Bill Belichick and the Patriots, whom he rallied to a 24-20 win over Jacksonville in the AFC championship after New England fell behind by 10 in the fourth quarter.

The only other NFL quarterback as decorated as Brady is Bart Starr, who led Green Bay to three NFL championships and wins in the first two Super Bowls.

"You cherish these moments and opportunities, and I know we've had quite a few of them, which we've been very blessed to do," Brady said. "And it's just been an unbelievable run."

The Patriots are seeking their third championship in four years, something that hasn't been done since Brady led New England to its first three titles from 2001-04, capped by a 24-21 win over Philadelphia on Feb. 6, 2005.

In a rematch of Super Bowl 39, Brady will seek to become the first 40-something QB to win a Super Bowl while Nick Foles seeks to show he has what it takes to lead Philadelphia to its first Super Bowl trophy.

The Eagles, who last won an NFL title in 1960, long before the first Super Bowl, turned



NICK FOLES

to Foles after star second-year quarterback Carson Wentz tore his left ACL in December.

Without Wentz, who had 33 TD throws and only seven interceptions when he got hurt, the Eagles were home underdogs to Atlanta and Minnesota in the playoffs but Foles led them past both teams, including a 38-7 rout of the Vikings in the NFC championship.

Foles understood, however, when oddsmakers made the Patriots, who are also 15-3 this season, a nearly touchdown favorite in Super Bowl 52.

"One of the greatest franchises ever. It's going to be an amazingly tall task," said Foles, adding, "We don't play this game to lose. We play it to win. We're going against one of the best teams in history and obviously Tom Brady, probably the greatest quarterback in the history of the game. So, we've got a lot of work to do."

While Brady will start his 37th playoff game and extend his own record with his eighth Super Bowl appearance, Foles will start only his fourth playoff game. He started two dozen games for the Eagles over his first three NFL seasons before spending a year in St. Louis and another in Kansas City.

Foles returned to Philadelphia in 2017 to serve as Wentz's backup and was again thrust into the starting lineup when Wentz got hurt in a win over the Rams in December.

A leading MVP candidate when he got hurt, Wentz was 11-2 as Philadelphia's starter. Foles is 4-1 since then. He went 26 of 33 for 352 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions against the Vikings with a 141.1 passer rating. He'll take an impressive resume into the Super Bowl: in three playoff games, he's 72 of 99 for

793 yards, five TDs and no picks.

Now he's headed to the big stage that Brady has made his own.

"It's unbelievable. You dream about these moments as a kid," Foles said. "And I'm blessed to be in this position, to be with such a great group of people and the city of Philadelphia. To be back in Philadelphia is humbling and I'm very grateful to be a part of this."

This will be Philadelphia's third trip to the big game; it lost to Oakland in 1981 besides its loss to New England 13 years ago.

The Eagles, who went 7-9 last season, jumped from worst to first in the NFC East, and kept rolling even after Wentz went down, in part because of their league-best run defense that complemented a well-rounded offense.

Behind another stellar season from Brady, the Patriots overcame the losses of receiver Julian Edelman in the preseason and star linebacker Dont'a Hightower at midseason.

Brady, a four-time Super Bowl MVP and two-time league MVP, and the Patriots own the NFL's No. 1 offense, which has covered the tracks of a 29th-ranked bend-but-don't-break defense.

"It's unbelievable what he does," teammate Rex Burkhead said. "The injuries he fights through and playing football at 40 years old is unreal. For him to do that and to go out there and continue to make plays is unbelievable, and it's why he's the greatest."



STATS

(Regular season)

WON 13, LOST 3

PATRIOTS	OPPONENTS
TOTAL FIRST DOWNS	
389	325
1ST DOWNS (Rush-Pass-By Penalty)	
107 - 232 - 50	98 - 204 - 23
3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS	
82/202	82/208
4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS	
8/13	10/23
TOTAL OFFENSIVE YARDS	
6,307	5,856
OFFENSE (Plays-Avg Yards)	
1,070 - 5.9	1,022 - 5.7
TOTAL RUSHING YARDS	
1,889	1,836
RUSHING (Plays-Avg Yards)	
448 - 4.2	390 - 4.7
TOTAL PASSING YARDS	
4,418	4,020
PASSING (Comp-Att-Int-Avg)	
389 - 587 - 8 - 7.9	367 - 590 - 12 - 7.3
SACKS	
42	35
FIELD GOALS	
37/40	22/31
TOUCHDOWNS	
49	33
RUSH-PASS-RET-DEF	
16 - 32 - 1 - 0	6 - 24 - 0 - 3
TIME OF POSSESSION	
30:37	29:22
TURNOVER RATIO	

KEYS TO THE GAME

FROM NICK FOLES

seeking to lead Philadelphia to its first Super Bowl title to Tom Brady looking to become the first quarterback to win six, there are plenty of subplots that will get a lot of attention leading up to the Big Game.

Here's some others that fans should keep an eye on:

THUMBS-UP

Brady will certainly be asked a lot about his injured right thumb even though it didn't appear to bother him in the AFC championship despite needing stitches and missing practice time during the week. Don't expect Bill Belichick to fret over his quarterback's health, however. "I mean, look, Tom did a great job and he's a tough guy, we all know that, all right?" Belichick said after Brady completed 26 of 38 passes for 290 yards and two TDs against Jacksonville in the AFC championship. "But, I mean, we're not talking about open-heart surgery here."

GRONK'S STATUS

Rob Gronkowski missed last year's playoffs and Brady is hoping his top target doesn't sit out this Super Bowl, too. The big tight end was knocked out of the AFC championship with a head injury after a helmet-to-helmet hit in the first half of New England's come-from-behind 24-20 win over the Jaguars. Gronkowski caught just one pass, for 21 yards, against Jacksonville and his injury ended a streak of six consecutive playoff games with a touchdown. Gronkowski led the league with 1,084 yards on 69 receptions this season.

DIFFERENT STROKES

The Patriots have three players in Gronkowski, receiver Brandin Cooks and running back Dion Lewis who had more than 1,000 scrimmage yards. The Eagles are the first team since the 1990 Giants to reach the Super Bowl with none. But the Eagles

do have the league's third-ranked rushing offense with three productive backs in Jay Ajayi, LeGarrette Blount (who has 10 TDs in 10 career playoff games) and Corey Clement, whom they've relied on to take the pressure off Foles after losing Carson Wentz.

PILE ON POINTS

The Eagles struggled to find an offensive rhythm without Wentz, scoring just 34 points over a three-game span before the NFC championship, when they broke out for 38 against the Vikings. Asked what clicked offensively, Foles said it was the team's mindset: "We weren't going to be timid. We weren't going to be fearful." That would be a good blueprint to follow against the Patriots, who won't be intimidated by the big stage. Settling for field goals and not touchdowns is a recipe for defeat against New England.

GETTING SACKED

Although Brady is playing like he's 30 and not 40 years old with a league-best 4,577 yards and an AFC-best 32 TDs, he's getting hit a lot more than he did last year. After getting sacked just 15 times in 2016, Brady was sacked 32 times during the season and the Jaguars got to him three times in the AFC championship. That hasn't stopped the Patriots from having the league's second-ranked offense.

COMEBACK KIDS

Brady has led the Patriots on a game-winning, fourth-quarter drive in all five of his Super Bowl wins, rallying from 25 points down to beat Atlanta last year and 10 points down to beat Seattle three years ago, overcoming a one-point deficit against Carolina in 2004 and leading tiebreaking drives against St. Louis (2001) and Philadelphia (2005). Brady came up short in two last-minute desperation drives in both losses to the Giants.



STATS

(Regular season)

WON 13, LOST 3

EAGLES	OPPONENTS
TOTAL FIRST DOWNS	
338 272	
1ST DOWNS (Rush-Pass-By Penalty)	
108 - 193 - 37 62 - 177 - 33	
3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS	
96/230 66/205	
4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS	
17/26 4/18	
TOTAL OFFENSIVE YARDS	
5,852 4,904	
OFFENSE (Plays-Avg Yards)	
1,073 - 5.5 976 - 5.0	
TOTAL RUSHING YARDS	
2,115 1,267	
RUSHING (Plays-Avg Yards)	
473 - 4.5 337 - 3.8	
TOTAL PASSING YARDS	
3,737 3,637	
PASSING (Comp-Att-Int-Avg)	
341 - 564 - 9 - 7.0 363 - 601 - 19 - 6.5	
SACKS	
38 36	
FIELD GOALS	
29/34 20/26	
TOUCHDOWNS	
53 34	
RUSH-PASS-RET-DEF	
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HUDDLE UP

# Fans, ‘hated’ is better than ‘irrelevant’

Among the many fallacies about the New England Patriots being pedaled by the media and jealous fans of every one else is that the Patriots were the laughing stock of the league before Bill Belichick and Tom Brady came along.

The Boston media, in particular, throws it out there, in a lazy attempt to try to show how far the Patriots have come in the past two decades.

But it is not true.

Among the Boston sports teams, yes, the Patriots were the laughing stocks. They were the most poorly-run organization. Schaeffer/Sullivan/Foxboro Stadium was a minor-league facility, and the franchise's first two owners, Billy Sullivan and Victor Kiam, were in over their heads. In Sullivan's case, he was usually drowning financially, too.

And it translated onto the field. Even when the Patriots had enough talent to win, the leadership, coaches, general managers and owners would find a way to screw it up by letting any player who asked for more money hold out or by firing their coach as they were winning their first division championship.

But the Patriots were rarely the laughing stock of the league. It was even worse than that.

They were irrelevant.

They could only strive to garner headlines for their futility that teams such as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Detroit Lions, New York Jets and New Orleans Saints did in the last three decades of the 20th century.

I repeat — the New England Patriots were irrelevant. Even when they were good, they were an afterthought.

In the late 1970s, the Patriots had a brief run as the hot, up-and-coming team, poised to challenge AFC powers Pittsburgh, Oakland and Miami. Howard Cosell called tight end Russ Francis "all-world," and Steve Grogan was considered one of the league's top young quarterbacks. But they underachieved, winning one division title and zero playoff games.

The Steelers, Raiders and Dolphins, and once Earl Campbell arrived, the Houston Oilers, dominated the conversation whenever the AFC's top contenders were debated. Even the San Diego Chargers drew more buzz because they were "Air Coryell," while the Patriots

were ground-and-pound boring.

Fans craved any national recognition for the Patriots. We watched the Sunday pregame shows and NFL Films highlights religiously, wondering if we would ever see anything on a Patriots player. There might be one feature for every five on the Oilers.

Those Patriot teams only showed up on the league's showcase event of that time, Monday Night Football, once or twice a season, about half as much as those other AFC contenders.

After some lean years in the 1980s, including the team's first true national laughing-stock moment, the Stupor Bowl against the Baltimore Colts in 1981, the Patriots were good again in the mid-1980s. They made a still-unfathomable run of winning three straight road games to make the Super Bowl in the 1985-86 season. As we all know, they ultimately succumbed to the most dominant team of my lifetime, the Chicago Bears.

That Bears team had a lot of strong personalities, starting with Jim McMahon and William "the Refrigerator" Perry, so they commanded the vast majority of the national media's attention in the build-up to Super Bowl XX. After the game ended, they remained the center of everyone's attention, even after Ron Borges broke a story in the Boston Globe that many of the Patriots players were abusing drugs during the season. Looking back, it seems odd that the scandal didn't resonate more nationally. But again, it involved a team that didn't have the brand recognition of a growing list of other NFL teams.

That team quickly faded into mediocrity, then took its second crack at becoming a national laughingstock in 1990 with a 1-15 team and the Lisa Olson incident.

That changed quickly with what turned out to be the seminal moment of the Patriots as we know them today — the hiring of Bill Parcells as head coach in 1993. I can remember literally pinching myself when Parcells was hired to make sure I wasn't dreaming. I could not believe my New England Patriots were about to be hired by a guy who was already a coaching legend. Why would he go to New England?

But the Patriots were never going to take the spotlight away from Brett Favre, Reggie White and the Green Bay Packers, but it wouldn't have mattered anyway. The story

that Parcells was going to the New York Jets broke in the week leading up to the game, so that was all anyone talked about when it came to the Patriots. And once he left, the Patriots were once again an afterthought, good but not good enough. Bad, but not bad enough.

We all know what happened after that. The Patriots hired Bill Belichick, drafted Tom Brady and pulled off one of the greatest upsets in Super Bowl history against the St. Louis Rams.

But in America's football consciousness, they were a Cinderella story waiting for the clock to strike midnight. Down the road, the Rams were the team to continue watching.

Of course, the Patriots won two of the next three Super Bowls while the national football cognoscenti struggled to figure out why they were so successful. John Madden explained Turducken better than he analyzed how the Patriots won.

The Patriots didn't fit into any of the football cliches they used as crutches, and this confused many of the pundits, even made them look foolish.

This is part of the reason everyone was so quick to latch on once Spygate broke in 2007. Finally, their success could be summed up in a neat little package.

They cheated.

The narrative follows the franchise a decade later. It's been around so long it's had time to take several different twists and turns. First it was the coach, then the quarterback, then the culture. Now, the league is in on it, giving the Patriots every call, every break.

Patriots fans are rightly sick of hearing about it but need to accept the fact that it is never going away, no matter how many facts they try to introduce into the dialogue. And it comes down to this — far too many of them are still desperately want their team to be loved.

More Patriots fans need to come over to the dark side and embrace the hate. Agree with the Patriots' detractors. Coax them into devising more conspiracy theories.

I'm doing my part, spreading rumors at every opportunity.

Gronk's concussion test this week? Ernie Adams took it for him. And the league knows it.

Brady's hand? It wasn't a cut. He's had his real hand replaced with a bionic one that can take a snap, deflate the ball and throw it during every play..

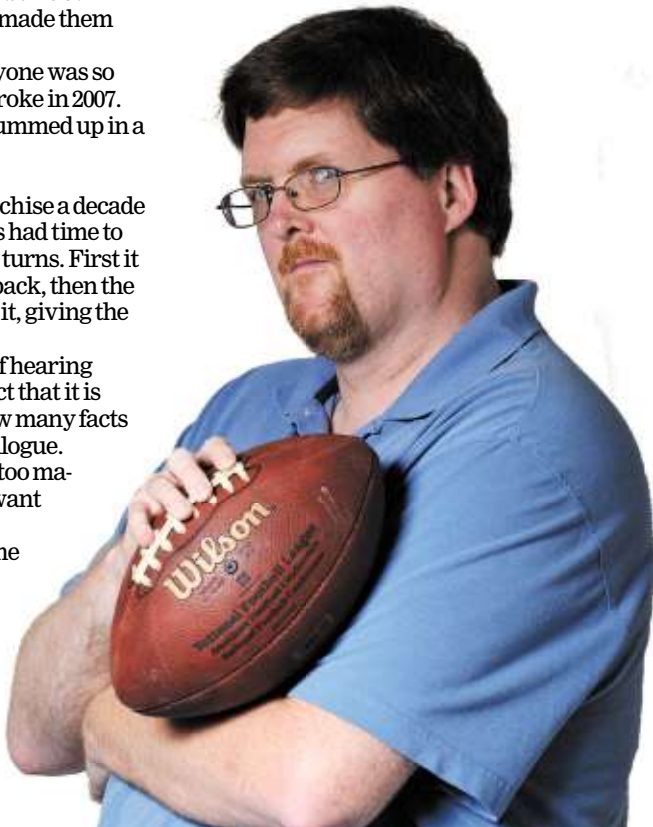
Bill Belichick tricked the Steelers into releasing James Harrison. I mean, nobody believes they could be that dumb, right?

Super Bowl referee Gene Steratore was the key grip for the TB12 documentary.

And, by the way, that is NOT Danny Amendola.

Eat your heart out, Seth Wickersham. And revel in the hate, Patriots fans. Your team is living rent free in America's collective brain, and it is glorious.

*A more complete version of this column can be found at [sunjournal.com/superbowl](http://sunjournal.com/superbowl).*



Randy Whitehouse is a staff writer who has never deflated a football, recorded a practice or interfered with headsets. But all of the sports department's backpacks went missing yesterday. Find him here: @RAWmaterial33; or here: [rwhitehouse@sunjournal.com](mailto:rwhitehouse@sunjournal.com).



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