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MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2019

WEEK 6

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New England Patriots Win Super Bowl LIII

The dynasty lives on.

Once again, the New England Patriots are champions, grinding to win Super Bowl LIII 13-3 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta -- and launching Tom Brady and Bill Belichick into a different stratosphere.

They have now won six Super Bowls together, extending their record for the most by a head coach and starting quarterback combination. With the win, the Patriots are tied with the Pittsburgh Steelers for the most Super Bowl titles in NFL history.

Brady now has won more Super Bowls than any other player in history, surpassing Pro Football Hall of Famer Charles Haley (five).

"It probably won't sink in for a very, very long time," Brady said. "I'm just so blessed to play with the best teammates through the years from our '01 team and all the way through now. I love all those guys. That's what makes this special, man. It's a brotherhood. All these relationships are so important in my life, and I can't cherish it enough. It's going to be a celebration tonight."

At 41 years old, Brady also is the oldest starting quarterback to win a Super Bowl, eclipsing Peyton Manning, who was 39 when he won Super Bowl 50.

Belichick is the oldest head coach to win a Super Bowl at age 66, and no head coach has won more Super Bowls than him. Now, he joins George Halas and Curly Lambeau as the only NFL head coaches with six championships since the league began postseason play in 1933. Belichick called this one "sweet."



"I'm proud of our football team, coaching staff, this entire organization," he said. "These guys worked so hard all year going all the way back to the offseason program in April and just grinding it out day after day. In the biggest moments when we had to play our best football and compete the hardest, they did it."

This was the pair's ninth Super Bowl appearance together, the most title games for any head coach and starting quarterback duo in NFL history.

Edelman named Super Bowl MVP

Brady was 21-for-35 passing for 262 yards, and most of those yards went to wide receiver Julian Edelman, who is boosting his hall-of-fame resume. Edelman -- who was named the game's MVP -- had 10 catches for 141 yards. In addition to already having the second-most receptions in postseason history, he's now second all time in postseason receiving yards. He trails just the legendary Jerry Rice in both categories.

Edelman, who in his college days was a quarterback at Kent State, was drafted by New England in the seventh round of the 2009 NFL draft. He is the seventh wide receiver to be named Super Bowl MVP.

"It just matters that we won, man," Edelman said. "It was a crazy year. We had a resilient bunch of guys. It was unreal, man."

After the win, among the crush of players, reporters and confetti, Brady and Edelman, who are close friends, shared a long embrace. Edelman, 32, missed all of last season with a knee injury and the first four games this season for violating the NFL's policy on performance-enhancing substances.

"He just played the best game he has all year," Brady said. "So proud of him (and) what he's accomplished coming back from his ACL (injury). He just fought it out, grinded it out just like everyone else."

High-powered offenses, but few points

The Rams had the No. 2 scoring offense in the NFL, while the Patriots were ranked fourth. But instead of a shootout, scoring came at a premium.

With 16 total points, it was the lowest-scoring game in Super Bowl history, and the Patriots' 13 points is the lowest by a winning team in a Super Bowl. It's also the first Super Bowl without a touchdown through the first three quarters.

A Stephen Gostkowski 42-yard field goal was the only scoring in the first half. The 3-0 score was the second-lowest scoring first half in Super Bowl history. Only Super Bowl IX, when the Steelers led the Minnesota Vikings 2-0, was lower. Rams kicker Greg Zuerlein's 53-yarder tied it with 2:11 left in the third quarter. Then came another classic Brady-led drive.



It started with a completed pass to tight end Rob Gronkowski for 18 yards. The crowd, which was majority Patriots fans, started chanting, "Brady! Brady!"

Brady then hit Edelman and Rex Burkhead for 13 and seven yards, respectively. Another throw to Gronkowski for 29 yards set up first-and-goal from the 2-yard line. Sony Michel ran it in from there for the touchdown with seven minutes to go.

The drive was five plays, 69 yards, and it took two minutes, 49 seconds, in which Brady went 4-for-4 for 67 yards.

Los Angeles tried to respond with a lengthy drive of its own, but quarterback Jared Goff was intercepted by Stephon Gilmore at the New England 4-yard line.

A 41-yard field goal by Gostkowski sealed it with 1:12 to go.

"That's my fault," Goff, in his third year at age 24, said of the interception. "I can't put us in that situation. I knew they were bringing cover-zero blitz there, and I tried to hit Brandin (Cooks) on a go-ball, and Gilmore was too far off for me to make that decision. It was a bad decision by me, and I have to do better."

McVay: 'I got out-coached'

Super Bowl LIII marked a rematch of Super Bowl XXXVI, when New England defeated the then-St. Louis Rams 20-17 on February 3, 2002. The Rams, who moved back to Los Angeles in 2016, were aiming for their second Super Bowl title and their first back out West.

Since the hiring of head coach Sean McVay, the youngest head coach in Super Bowl history at age 33, this was their second consecutive year in the playoffs.

"Coach Belichick did an outstanding job," McVay said. "There is really no other way to put it. I'm pretty numb right now, but definitely, I got out-coached. I didn't do nearly good enough for our football team. The thing that is so tough about all of this is the finality to it."

"Usually, you get a chance -- if you go through some adversity, you can bounce back right away. This one is going to stick with you and it just stings in your gut."

CREDIT: Jill Martin, CNN

<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/03/sport/super-bowl-liiii-patriots-rams/index.html>

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MLS, Atlanta United and Miguel Almiron: The game has been changed

Atlanta United sold Miguel Almiron for a record \$21 million this week. It is not unreasonable to say that they have changed the very fabric of MLS.

It has finally happened. Atlanta United have sold Miguel Almiron. On Thursday this week, it was officially announced that Newcastle United would sign the attacking midfielder for a reported fee of \$27 million, depending on certain clauses.

It is the biggest sale in Major League Soccer history, and by almost double the next biggest sale, it remarkably puts Atlanta United top in terms of revenue through player sales in the history of the league, and it is a transfer process that has shaped the very fabric of the league. Atlanta have changed the game.

On Thursday, Bobby Warshaw stated that there were four players who have fundamentally changed the way MLS franchises go about business: David Beckham, Sebastian Giovinco, Alphonso Davies, and now Miguel Almiron.

While his wording may be a little awkward, his point stands perfectly: the Almiron era at Atlanta has completely and utterly changed the nature of MLS and the impact will ripple throughout the league for many, many years to come.

In just two years, Atlanta signed Almiron for \$8 million, made the playoffs twice, won an MLS Cup, and then made \$21 million profit minus wages. That really is a game-changing investment.

And Almiron is one of just many. Atlanta hired one of the best South American coaches in the world, signed an MLS record goalscorer, broke the transfer record with a \$15 million investment, won the MLS, nearly set the regular-season points total, signed the reigning South American Player of the Year, and then broke the MLS sales record.

MLS, Atlanta United and Miguel Almiron: The game has been changed... Continued...

There will be much jealousy of Atlanta, their spending power, their 'plastic' fan base, their superiority complex. But if you can take the time to step back and simply survey what they have done, it is undeniable that they have completely revolutionised football in North America.

You can see other franchises beginning to take on similar approaches. The coach hirings this offseason were predominantly young, looking to instill a culture that will improve talent and provide an opportunity to then sell that talent for profit. Designated Player signings have moved away from the retiring European and towards the burgeoning youngster. Transfer fees are seen as investments, not prices.

These shifts in culture and management are all because of Atlanta United change the game. I am not sure it is possible to overstate the massive impact that the Almiron sale will have on MLS. And this is all without him kicking a ball. Just imagine if he goes on to light up the Premier League?



CREDIT: Andrew Dowdeswell

<https://mlsmultiplex.com/2019/02/01/mls-atlanta-united-miguel-almiron-game-changed/>

Mihailović earns second USMNT cap, start in win over Costa Rica

Six days after his stellar debut performance with the U.S. Men's National Team, Chicago Fire Homegrown midfielder Djordje Mihailović collected his second USMNT cap and start in Saturday's 2-0 win over Costa Rica, bringing to an end a successful first experience with the senior squad.

Hosting an experienced Ticos side at Avaya Stadium in San Jose, the U.S. fought to find its attacking rhythm through much of the first 45 minutes of Saturday's friendly, but managed to put the pressure on the visitors in the final third right from the start of the second half. It wasn't until the 80th minute that the U.S. found the breakthrough, which came courtesy of Bay Area native Sebastian Lletget and was followed up by an 88th-minute goal by Paul Arriola to seal the win.

After going 62 minutes in his USMNT debut last Sunday, Mihailović added another 63-minute shift to his U.S. ledger against Costa Rica. Mihailović's two best looks at goal came in quick succession in the second half, but both were well-defended by the Ticos and snuffed out just as they left the foot of the 20-year-old midfielder.

For the game, the U.S. finished with 66 percent of the possession and a 17-10 advantage in total shots.

With his inaugural USMNT camp experience complete, Mihailović will now have the opportunity to make his way to Madrid and join his Chicago Fire teammates in the midst of preseason preparations for the 2019 MLS season. The Fire officially open the campaign one month from Saturday with a nationally televised road test against the LA Galaxy (Saturday, March 2, 7 PM CT, FS1).

CREDIT: CHICAGO FIRE SOCCER CLUB



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BULLS COME OUT STRONG, BUT FALL TO CHARLOTTE 125-118

There's a basketball saying that was once a warning, that you live by the three and you die by the three. Now in the NBA, it often seems you survive because of the three. And once again it killed the Bulls in Saturday's 125-118 loss to the Charlotte Hornets.

"That left corner was hot; hit a lot of threes in that left corner," noted Bobby Portis, who did his part with four of eight threes and 33 points, though 28 in the first half when the Bulls had a 15-point lead. "Obviously, Kemba (Walker with 37 points) is an All Star, and he got it rolling. Kind of hard to stop them when Kemba is rolling, got the crowd involved, feeling good about themselves. Everything was going in. We have to do a better job playing with the lead. There have been over 10 games this year when we have been up and everything just dismantled."



And once again it did, the Bulls 60-51 halftime lead evaporating in the third quarter amidst a pair of what coach Jim Boylen said were crucial breakdowns on a missed free throw box out that led to a four-point play and late fouls that gave Charlotte 10 free throws in a 16-8 close to the third quarter. So the Hornets, 26-26, were leading 88-86 entering the fourth quarter with again the play of the Bulls reserves pivotal.

"The second unit was playing hard and Bobby got it going," noted Cristiano Felicio, who had a rare run and finished with a team best plus-six rating. "But they came back and hit tough shots in the fourth quarter and we could not get the stops needed."

That was in a fatal-for-the-Bulls 15-0 Charlotte fourth quarter charge over three minutes after the Bulls regained a 100-99 lead on two Lauri Markkanen free throws with 7:28 left. Markkanen made all 13 of his free throw attempts in a perfect Bulls 25 for 25 at the line among Markkanen's 30 points.

"I think we are getting better and trying to be on the same page," said Markkanen. "We have to get the balance of guarding and preventing fast breaks and quality possessions on both ends of the floor. We are working every day and hope it's not for nothing and feel we are getting closer as a team; it's a process, for sure."

It was Markkanen who was exposed in that determinate fourth quarter stretch, though the Hornets primarily took advantage of Kris Dunn accepting the switch and handing the speedy Walker off to Markkanen to stop. The seven footer tried, but it was futile as Walker had 15 fourth quarter points, 11 in that run along with an assist on one of those corner threes from Nic Batum that Portis referenced. The Hornets cashed in six fourth quarter threes to one for the Bulls, 14 for the game to nine for the Bulls.

Those 15-point swings in three-point scoring margin have haunted the Bulls all season.

Within three minutes in that sequence, the Hornets had a 14-point lead and the Bulls were on the way home with a 12-41 record to host New Orleans Wednesday.

Zach LaVine pushed through two balky ankles for 18 points, five rebounds and three assists, shooting seven of 12. Shaquille Harrison had 10 points in 17 minutes off the bench. All the Bulls reserves had plus ratings; all the starters had minus ratings.

"I want to give Zach credit for playing," Boylen said as he opened his post game remarks. "He's banged up. That ankle is sore, so I am glad he fought through and played."

Dunn had difficulties again with seven points on three of 11 shooting. The Hornets scored 74 second half points on 62.2 percent shooting as the Bulls have been increasing their playing pace and offensive options. It was the 15th consecutive game the Bulls have scored at least 100 points, the longest such team streak since the early 1990s.

"We are starting to establish a style of play," Boylen had said earlier before the game. "Offensively, we are starting to play the way I hope we can play. I backed us down, slowed it down. We kind of crawled for a couple of weeks and then we started walking and now I think we are starting to run with the multi-ballhandlers we have and with getting some stops recently, getting us out in transition; it's been good for us. The ball has been moving around, we've been getting downhill, starting to establish that style of play offensively."

But it hasn't included the three-point shooting component, and as much as the Bulls tried to blend in aggressive defense, it's difficult in this era to dismiss the effect of the three-point shot. Particularly since it's so protected by the officials, who are quick to call even brush and phantom fouls when defenders get near three-point shooters. It happened early in the game to Ryan Arcidiacono, and there was a crucial one late in the third quarter when Charlotte took a lead. It wasn't so much the official missed the call. It's more that the league is legislating for the three-point shot; and if you don't attempt it, you almost always are being penalized.

The Milwaukee Bucks have a supernova in Giannis Antetokounmpo. But their elevation to the league's best record with marginal, at best, All-Star talent around Antetokounmpo has been the product of being second in the league in three-point attempts. The Rockets, of course, are first and the Celtics are third. Resurgent Brooklyn is fourth. There are high volume outliers where the record doesn't translate, like with Atlanta. And there are exceptions like the 76ers and Spurs, both with All-Star talent at mid range games. And, of course, the three-point avatar Golden State Warriors keep firing away from distance.

"Offensively, we are starting to play the way I hope we can play." - Coach Boylen

The Bulls are starting to score consistency and at a higher rate, but the lack of threes continues to make the difference in so many late game losses. The Bulls, for example, have been outscored on threes in 14 of the last 19 games.

"They had a great second half," acknowledged Boylen of the Hornets. "The ball was moving and they made tough shots. I thought we helped them in the third by fouling the shooter; the missed free throw box out three was a big play. That being said, I thought we did a lot of good things and are improving offensively. We lost some of our grit defensively the second half; give them credit. But Bobby had a big game, Lauri had a big game. Lauri pushing that ball is good for us and the way we started was really good."

It was the Markkanen and Portis show with the forwards running a tag team shooting game that enabled the Bulls to trail 27-26 after the first quarter. Then Portis, who blitzed Miami for 26 points in Wednesday's Bulls win, was king in the Queen City with a scoring barrage to open the second quarter.

"Obviously, my role on this team is to come in and score the basketball, rebound the basketball at a high level, compete," said Portis. "I think I've been doing that the last two games and I have to keep that rolling for the rest of the season."

Portis had a break out 22 second quarter points, including the first 10 Bulls points of the second quarter. Portis was making threes, powering inside and running out for scores after his own defensive plays. The entire Hornets team only outscored him by two the second quarter.

More on this article found on: <https://www.nba.com/bulls/bulls-come-out-strong-fall-charlotte-125-118>



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