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Ramshackled

Patriots upset heavily favored St. Louis in Super Bowl

By BARRY WILNER
AP Football Writer

NEW ORLEANS — They came through in the blustery snow of New England and in perfect conditions inside the Superdome. They went from being a 5-5 also-ran to nine straight victories and their first Super Bowl title.

On a day designed for heroes, in a site that resembled a military fortress as much as a stadium, the Patriots' charmed season brought them to the top of pro football with a 20-17 upset of the St. Louis Rams on Sunday.

"This is something to relish, sit back and soak in," said Adam Vinatieri, whose 48-yard field goal on the final play set off wild celebrations by the 14-point underdogs.

Vinatieri has never missed inside a dome — he also had a 37-yarder Sunday — but, far more impressively, he made two critical field goals at home in the snow two weeks ago against Oakland to keep New England alive.

"I think that about every close game we had a chance to win, we won," he said. "I think when we were 0-2, everybody wrote us off except for the members of this team. We got on a streak and we just kept going."

The game was as much a victory for America as for the red-white-and-blue clad New Englanders. On a day filled with patriotic themes inside the Superdome and high security outside, everything went off without a hitch.

Fans were urged to show up five hours before kickoff to get through a perimeter filled with soldiers on the ground and sharpshooters on the roof. For their cooperation, they were treated to one of the great endings in NFL history.

League MVP Kurt Warner woke up to rally the Rams, who had the NFL's best record (14-2) and most powerful offense this season, from a 17-3 hole. He sneaked for a 2-yard touchdown, his first rushing score all season, two



plays after a holding penalty on New England's Willie McGinest negated Tebucky Jones' 98-yard romp with Warner's fumble that would have clinched the win.

Then Warner needed only three plays and 21 seconds to take the Rams 55 yards, with Ricky Proehl's 26-yard TD reception tying it with 1:30 remaining.

"We had a lot of new life," said Warner, who was harried all game and threw two interceptions that resulted in 10 points. "We figured we'd hold them and have overtime."

Instead, second-year quarterback Tom Brady, who sprained his ankle in the AFC championship game, but was healthy enough to start the Super Bowl, earned game MVP honors with a poised 53-yard drive. It included a 23-yard completion to Troy Brown that got the Patriots in range for Vinatieri.

"I was planning to go out there and win the game," said Brady, who was so calm he took a nap in the locker room before the game. "Adam wasn't going to miss that kick."

Vinatieri, who nailed a 45-yarder in the snow to tie Oakland and then a 23-yarder to beat the Raiders in overtime, wouldn't have been in such a position without the only three take-aways of the game.

Ty Law ran back an interception 47 yards for the Patriots' first points. Terrell Buckley went 15 yards with a fumble recovery to set up another touchdown, an 8-yard leaping recep-

tion by David Patten. And Otis Smith ran another interception 30 yards, leading to Vinatieri's first field goal.

The Rams led the NFL with 44 giveaways this year. Their biggest giveaway — the Super Bowl — came Sunday.

"I think we didn't help the cause," said Ricky Proehl, whose fumble was forced by Antwan Harris' helmet, leading to Patten's score. "They have capitalized on turnovers all year, and that's how they won the game."

New England got physical from the start, giving Warner a bloody lip and slamming Rams receivers to the turf with regularity. The Patriots also didn't let Offensive Player of the Year Marshall Faulk damage them much.

Credit coach Bill Belichick, who reinforced his image as a defensive mastermind. While the Rams got their yards and did make their comeback, they never were in control.

"Coach Belichick definitely had a vision," safety Lawyer Milloy said. "This organization had a vision. We all came together. That's what is so sweet about this."

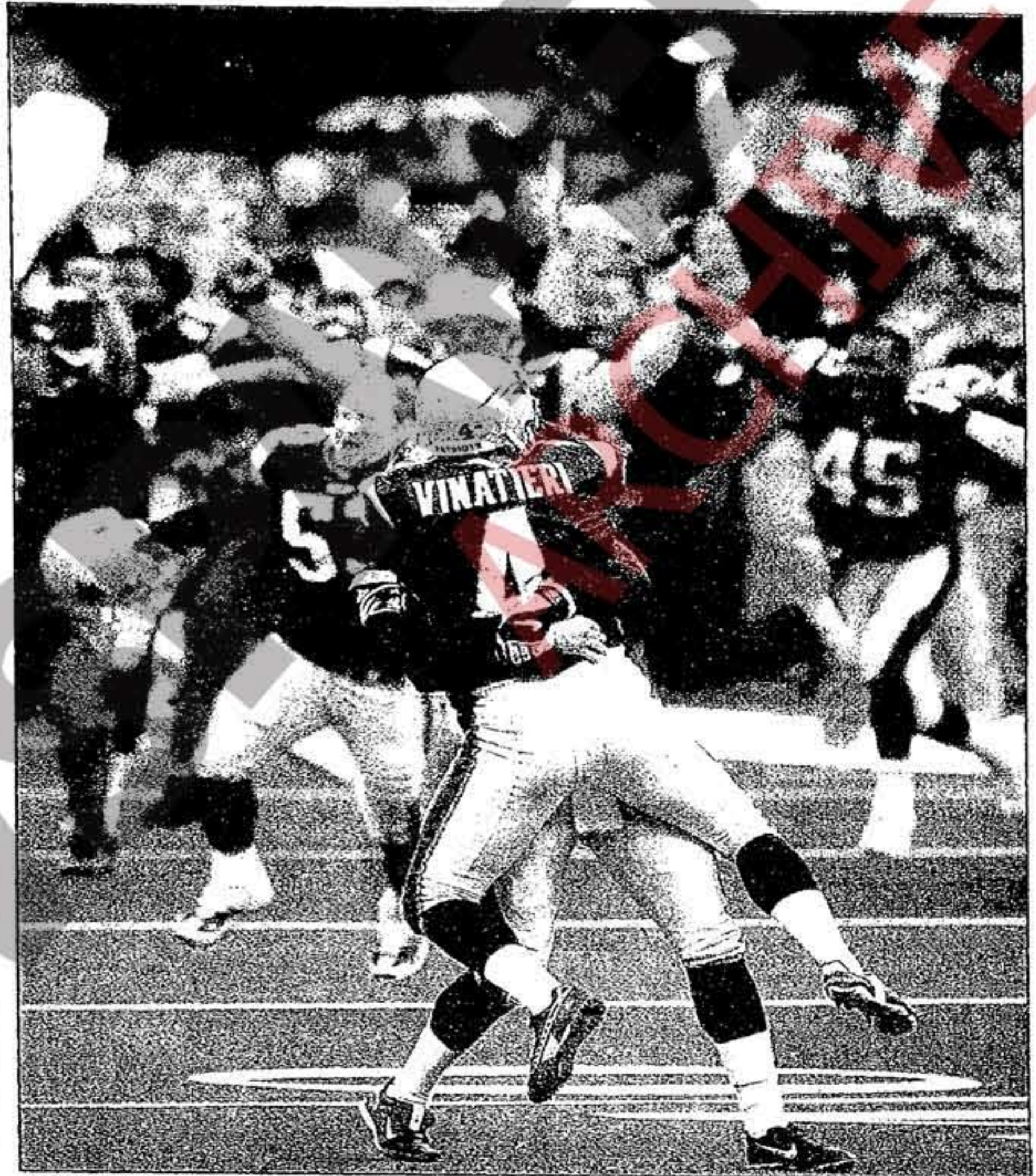
The Patriots, 50-1 shots to start the season, are the first from the New England region to win a pro football title since the 1928 Providence Steamrollers. It was an improbable ride after going 5-11 in 2000 and then losing starting quarterback Drew Bledsoe to a chest injury in Game 2.

But after their 0-2 start, the Patriots found their way with Brady, an aggressive defense — and some good fortune.

A replay reversal in the playoff game with the Raiders was as pivotal as anything in getting the Patriots to their third Super Bowl — all in New Orleans, the previous two ending in defeat. Special teams scored twice in the AFC championship game victory at Pittsburgh.

But luck wasn't the operative word for these Patriots. Team was.

"We've got a whole team full of underdogs," Brady said. "And now we're the top dogs."



Adam Vinatieri and the Patriots celebrated after the game-winning kick sailed through the uprights. (AP photo)

Brady shatters myths

By BOB RYAN
The Boston Globe

NEW ORLEANS — They say it takes how long to make someone into an effective quarterback in this league?

There no longer can be rules or maxims involving quarterbacks. Tom Brady has shattered all the myths. Henceforth, if you can play, you can play. There might be other Bradys out there, other second-year players who completed one pass in three attempts as a rookie, who get their chance when the nine-year veteran gets hurt, and who then conclude a 13-3 regular season and playoff combined run by directing their teams downfield in the final 1 minute 21 seconds of the Super Bowl to put them in position for the winning field goal.

But don't bet Junior's school lunch money on it.

Brady may be the exception that proves the rule. Brady may be the NFL's single most inexplicable personnel phenomenon, a sixth-round pick who spends the season in extended on-the-job training and winds up as the MVP in the Super Bowl.

When Brady took control of the huddle with that 1:21 left, no timeouts remaining, the ball on the Patriots 17-yard line, and the score tied at 17 after the Patriots had once led by a 17-3 score, his teammates did not see a kid quarterback. They saw a leader.

"You can't say enough about that kid," marveled wide receiver David Patten. "He has a tremendous amount of confidence, and it rubs off on everyone else. You look in his eyes and say, 'Hey, we've got to go down and win it for this kid.'"

"What can I say about Tom Brady?" added linebacker Tedy Bruschi. "That minute-and-30-second drive has got to be one of the biggest drives in Super Bowl history."

"Brady brings a lot of confidence to the team in that huddle," said guard Joe Andruzzi.

Brady's modest final numbers show you what you can do with numbers when the only real issue is what's on the scoreboard. He was 16 for 27 for 145 yards and one touchdown. But in what you would have to agree was a reasonably important game, he threw no interceptions and did nothing stupid. "Tom did a super job of managing the game," lauded



Patriots quarterback Tom Brady had a laugh as he was interviewed by Terry Bradshaw. (AP photo)

coach Bill Belichick.

Brady was only overtly great when he had to be. On that final drive, during which he moved the team from its 17 to the Rams 30 in seven plays before spiking the ball to stop the clock at :07, he completed 5 of 7 passes, including a simple throw-away and another spike. The whole performance was eerily similar to his work in the Snow Bowl two weeks ago, when he saved his best for last.

"He did what his team needed him to do," said Rams quarterback Kurt Warner. "He made the plays on the last drive that got them the win. He's done that all year. My hat's off to him."

Brady was so fazed by his first Super Bowl that he took a nap upon arrival. "I fell asleep," he reported, "and when I woke up I said to myself I didn't think I'd feel this good. I convinced myself that it was just a game, just another game."

In some ways, it was. Brady mostly threw the short- and medium-route passes that are his trademark. He had enough of a running game to keep the Rams honest. The defense made huge plays. And when Brady had to be more than just competent, when he needed to be special, he entered another realm and made the plays that had to be made.

I am of the firm belief that in the matter of Truth vs. Fiction, especially when it involves your 2001-02 Patriots, it is always wise to take Truth, plus the points. Like, did Drew Bled-

soe, the Big Brother/Mentor/Rival, really instruct Brady just before that final drive to "Go out there and sling it?" Well, yes, he did. And did Brady, needing something more than a dink or dunk job, really hit — guess who? — Troy Brown for 23 yards on second and 10 at the Patriots 41? Of course.

"That was the big play," Brady said. "It's called '64 Max All-End,' and the Max stands for, as my coach says, 'We need the maximum time for me to throw.'"

The throw was around neck high, but Brown, a.k.a. Mr. Reliable, snatched it out of the air and ran out of bounds. "The way the Rams play, they really read the quarterback's eyes. I was looking hard to the right, and Troy slipped behind them. They lost sight of him. I hit him, and he did the rest."

That put the ball on the Rams 36. Brady completed one more, to Jermaine Wiggins for 6 yards, spiked the ball, and turned the proceedings over to Adam Vinatieri, who never had missed an indoor field goal attempt — and still hasn't.

This Brady is a kid whose only realistic goal when the season started was "to become a far better player by the time it was over." The only way he was going to get Bledsoe's job was if Bledsoe got hurt.

The Super Bowl, Tom Brady just won the Super Bowl. How bizarre is that?

"I ran into Dan Marino down here." Continued on page 14

Belichick makes his schemes come to life

By JIM LITKE
AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS — Bill Belichick's players will always be Xs and Os on a page.

But credit him with this much: He's learned it takes more than a pencil to make his schemes come to life.

The coach's son who was more interested in poring over his father's game plans than playing with the rest of the 5-year-old boys in the neighborhood has grown into a man who still is more comfortable with a playbook than people.

All during the week leading up to the Super Bowl, Belichick's New England Patriots painted a picture of a controlling coach who smiled only grudgingly when they won, and often was so consumed he wouldn't talk to them after a loss.

Not surprisingly, even after this win, Belichick remained a man of few words. What seemed different, though, was how he used them.

"These players, a lot of other people didn't believe in them, but they believe in themselves," he said. "And that is all that matters."

Stunning as New England's 20-17 win over St. Louis seemed, stranger still is that those players allowed Belichick into their inner circle. Or maybe that he changed enough to be let in.

At previous stops, as Bill Parcells' assistant in New York and New England, and then on his own in Cleveland, Belichick lost touch with his teams. He made them practice more than they wanted, always in pads, and always with an intensity few cared to match. They had the sense they were chess pieces for a man who never stopped scheming.

Behind his back, they called Belichick things like "Butthead" and "Little Bill," even if they never doubted his ability to draw up a game plan that always gave them a chance to win.

"Coach Belichick," said linebacker Ted Johnson, "is a mastermind." Scheming, though, was never his problem. St. Louis coach Mike Martz's innovative attack got most of the attention and Las Vegas' endorsement — by a 14-point margin — but it was Belichick who did most of the gambling.

The Rams, who averaged 19 points in the first half this season, had only three at halftime, and it wasn't hard to see why. Belichick countered their fire-drill passing attack with five, six



Bill Belichick masterminded the game plan that shut down the Rams. (AP photo)

and even seven defensive backs nearly twice as often as playing with the standard four. And even after Martz opened the second half with Marshall Faulk running the ball more, trying to force Belichick to bring more defenders to the line of scrimmage, he refused to bite.

Afterward, Martz admitted a certain grudging admiration. "I think if we don't turn the ball over, we're probably in pretty good shape. But to say that insults those Patriots team. They created those turnovers. They did a good job of doing that."

Martz shouldn't have been surprised. People in the business will tell you nobody is better than Belichick at finding an opponent's weakness, or better at exploiting it on paper. Finding a team that believed in him enough to carry it out was another story.

In that sense, Belichick rarely helped his own cause. The first time he tried to climb out of Parcells'

shadow in Cleveland, he benched local hero Bernie Kosar, then cut the quarterback when the team was 5-3 and wound up going 7-9.

Then, as part of a contractual agreement that guaranteed he would succeed Parcells in the New York Jets' job, he resigned after one day at a news conference called to announce his hiring.

After some wrangling, Patriots owner Robert Kraft gave the Jets a first-round pick for Belichick the week of the Super Bowl. It made his new coach look like a villain before he ever set foot in New England.

"The best deal I ever made was getting this guy," Kraft said Sunday, holding the Vince Lombardi Trophy aloft as proof.

But convincing the players was another story. Two games into this season, starting quarterback Drew Bledsoe sheared a blood vessel in his chest after a vicious hit by the Jets' Mo Lewis, and Tom Brady stepped in.

Bledsoe was healthy in time for the Rams' game in November, but the Patriots lost, slipped to 5-5 and Belichick announced the next day that Brady would start the rest of the way.

New England hasn't lost since. Bledsoe's classy demeanor kept the rift from affecting the team, but even today he says of Belichick, "We have a player-coach relationship, nothing more."

Yet, instead of tearing the team apart, the incident brought the Patriots together. In October, they decided to skip having one unit introduced at the start of each game and insisted on coming out on the field together.

"That's what's so sweet about all this," safety Lawyer Milloy said. "We all came together. We grew, we evolved as a team."

It wasn't that Belichick changed all that much, only that he became a little better at letting his players know where they stood. It may be because he was forced to, or because, with Parcells out of the game, he no longer feels the need to be such a tyrant.

Other men win a Super Bowl, and it changes them forever. Nothing of the sort will happen to Belichick.

He's changed about as much as he knows how already.

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