



Tom Brady can become the third quarterback to win four Super Bowls; Eli Manning and coach Tom Coughlin hoisted the Lombardi Trophy in 2007.

Associated Press file photos; Star Tribune illustration

- Fair or not, an NFL quarterback usually enters another realm when he wins a Super Bowl — better yet, multiple Super Bowls. Today's participants, Eli Manning and Tom Brady, are proof.

THE DEFINITION OF GREATNESS

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Amazing what we choose to remember and how much we tend to forget. ¶ That's the best explanation for why Giants quarterback Eli Manning has been bouncing around Indianapolis for the past week with a perpetual glow, his liveliness at least partially the result of so many experts suddenly attempting to fit a solid gold frame around his career.

The praise-filled Manning conversations have continued spreading with great sincerity.

Is he now suddenly a more clutch leader than New England's Tom Brady?

If he beats Brady and the Patriots on Sunday night in Super Bowl XLVI, will he suddenly move into a quarterback class above older brother Peyton?

And might a second Super Bowl triumph clear a path for Manning to charge toward the Hall of Fame?

Outlandish questions to some. But they are perfectly valid to others and only being asked because Manning is already a Super Bowl champion.

Fair or not, in the greatness determination process, quarterbacks are inevitably checked first for jewelry. And Manning earned his first Super Bowl ring four years ago by leading a 12-play, 83-yard touchdown drive to

close a stunning 17-14 upset of New England.

Just like that, his career received permanent sheen.

Never mind that Manning has a career quarterback rating of 82.1. And never mind that only seven weeks ago, after a three-interception clunker in a home loss to the Washington Redskins, his Giants were 7-7 and looking nothing like a Super Bowl contender.

He has clawed his way back into the game that means so much.

"Quarterbacks will always be judged by how they finish, by those end results," Giants receiver Hakeem Nicks said. "So of course, Eli has played a lot more football than just that game four years ago. But when you win a Super Bowl, it has to count for more than everything else."

Super Bowl continues on C9 ►

Belichick, Brady might be Lords of the Rings, but don't buy the myth



Jim Souhan

The power of myth has persuaded many Americans that the New England Patriots are a great team that will beat the New York Giants. I say the Patriots are not, and probably will not.

The Patriots command adulation because of the reputations of Bill Belichick and Tom Brady, who have won three Super Bowls together and narrowly

lost a fourth. Those willing to look beyond their legends will find that the momentum of their dynasty has slowed.

Brady has played in 21 NFL postseason games. In his first 10, he went 10-0, including 3-0 in Super Bowls, while throwing 14 touchdowns and three interceptions. In his last 11, he is 6-5 with 22 touchdowns and 16 interceptions. If you throw out his victory over Tim Tebow's Broncos this season as unworthy of a playoff game, then Brady would be 5-5 with 16 touchdowns

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Game preview, rosters, stats C8 ►►



super bowl XLVI

« SUDDENLY PEOPLE HAD NO TROUBLE VIEWING ELI AS A BONA FIDE WINNER. »

Giants offensive coordinator Kevin Gilbride on what winning a Super Bowl means

« TOM IS WHO TOM IS BECAUSE HE'S WON CONSISTENTLY FOR 12 YEARS. »

Running back Kevin Faulk, longtime teammate of Tom Brady

THE DEFINITION OF GREATNESS

◀ SUPER BOWL FROM C1

Trash or treasure

The Giants' final drive of Super Bowl XLII will always be remembered for its magic. Yes, Manning's miracle escape and 32-yard bomb to David Tyree registers as one of the most unforgettable plays in league history. And that was followed four plays later by a Lombardi Trophy-clinching 14-yard TD toss from Manning to Plaxico Burress.

But with the end result so significant, what's easily forgotten is how flawed that drive truly was.

"Trash," said Warren Sapp, a former star defensive tackle turned honest critic. "That was in no way a drive you go home and want to watch again. No way."

What's forgotten about Super Bowl XLII is that before the Giants' final drive, Manning had been ordinary all night — 14-for-25 for 178 yards with a touchdown and an interception.

And even on the final drive, the one that now helps to define his legacy, Manning had moments of obvious shakiness.

"Truth be told, I really don't recall much about that possession," Giants right tackle Kareem McKenzie said. "Only that we scored a touchdown."

McKenzie doesn't remember Manning's four wobbly incompletions on the final drive. Or the fourth-and-2 play Brandon Jacobs converted by about 8 inches. Or the sack delivered by New England's Adalius Thomas. Or the miscommunication between Manning and Tyree that led to a dangerous pass down the right sideline that New England cornerback Asante Samuel should have intercepted.

Heck, even the Giants' miracle moment had fundamental flaws.

"Greatest play ever? Please," Sapp said. "It may be the worst pass in the history of football. It was high, it was late and it was over the middle. You don't throw that as a quarterback."

Still, selective memory can provide wonderful fulfillment. It has for Giants offensive coordinator Kevin Gilbride.

"I liked that drive," he said. "I'll take that result every time."

Gilbride takes that stance because he knows the credibility and trust Manning earned



Tom Brady and Eli Manning already have squared off once this season. Manning led the Giants to a 24-20 victory over the Patriots on Nov. 6 in Foxborough, Mass.

with that game-winning drive. Gilbride knows how the outside perception changed almost instantly regarding his inconsistent young quarterback.

Manning finished the 2007 regular season with a 73.9 rating, worse than Atlanta's Joe Harrington, Baltimore's Kyle Boller and Chicago's Brian Griese, but he left the final game of that season with his reputation enhanced.

"Suddenly people had no trouble viewing Eli as a bona fide winner," Gilbride said.

"He immediately became one of the special guys. These discussions this week of just how elite Eli has become, what puts you in that picture to begin with is when on the biggest of stages you've performed in a way that leads your team to a win."

The end that matters

Manning's counterpart Sunday night began shaping his career with his own clutch play in the final minute of his first Super Bowl back in 2001.

The Patriots were heavy underdogs that night in

New Orleans. And Tom Brady was a 24-year-old upstart with a very short résumé. Until he led a nine-play, 53-yard field goal drive in the final 1:30 to punctuate a 20-17 upset.

Brady won two more Super Bowls soon after and now could climb to the top platform of championship glory, in position to join Joe Montana and Terry Bradshaw with his fourth Super Bowl triumph.

"Everybody on the outside judges what greatness is," Patriots running back Kevin Faulk said. "But Tom is who

Tom is because he's won consistently for 12 years. More than that, he's legendary because he has rings."

That's just the way it is. Dan Marino threw for 61,361 yards and 420 touchdowns and made nine Pro Bowls over 17 seasons. But his inability to win a Super Bowl left a small but noticeable stain on his brilliance.

Same goes for Jim Kelly. Like Marino, he too is a Hall of Famer who garners widespread respect. But Kelly's 0-4 record in Super Bowls denies him full access into the "best ever" conversation.

John Elway? His excellence was often overshadowed by his inability to claim a championship — until back-to-back Super Bowl wins in his final two seasons added so much more luster to his career.

And all these passing records Drew Brees has been shattering? The lens under which his production is viewed would undoubtedly differ had he not won a Super Bowl two years ago.

All in

Logical or not, the value of that Super Bowl ring is immeasurable for a quarterback. In Manning's case, it bought patience in New York.

"The naysayers no longer had their ammunition," McKenzie said. "You win a Super Bowl, that's concrete proof that you are indeed a good quarterback."

Added Super Bowl-winning coach Brian Billick, now an analyst for NFL Network: "Without that first ring, I'm not sure Eli would have been allowed to have this subsequent success given the crush of the criticism that would have otherwise existed with it being New York and him being a Manning. He would have been crushed as a guy who couldn't win the big one. And that's not altogether fair. Because he's been the same player doing the same things."

Yet the end result is what matters more than anything else. Getting the picture of what's at stake at Lucas Oil Stadium?

With a New England victory, Brady might just end any debate as to whether he's the best that's ever played. And if the Giants prevail?

"If Eli wins this one," Billick said, "he's the king of New York for as long as he wants to be."

WINNING SUPER BOWL QUARTERBACKS



Terry Bradshaw

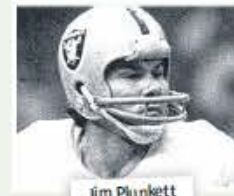
HALL OF FAMERS (AND TITLES WON)

Terry Bradshaw	4
Joe Montana	4
Troy Aikman	3
Bart Starr	2
Bob Griese	2
Roger Staubach	2
John Elway	2
Joe Namath	1
Len Dawson	1
*Johnny Unitas	1
Steve Young	1

PROJECTED

HALL OF FAMERS

Tom Brady	3
Ben Roethlisberger	2
Brett Favre	1
Peyton Manning	1
Drew Brees	1
Kurt Warner	1
Eli Manning	1
Aaron Rodgers	1



Jim Plunkett

NON-HALL OF FAMERS

Jim Plunkett	2
Phil Simms	1
Ken Stabler	1
*Earl Morrall	1
Mark Rypien	1
Joe Theismann	1
Jim McMahon	1
Doug Williams	1
Jeff Hostetler	1
Trent Dilfer	1
Brad Johnson	1

*Unitas started Super Bowl V for the Colts but was injured and Morrall finished.

DID YOU KNOW?

• Hall of Fame quarterbacks Jim Kelly (0-4), Fran Tarkenton (0-3) and Dan Marino (0-1) played in, but never won, a Super Bowl.
• Warren Moon, Sonny Jurgensen and Dan Fouts are the only HOF quarterbacks from the Super Bowl era who did not play in a Super Bowl (Jurgensen was a backup in Super Bowl VII).