

# Super Bowl Mania Comes to SA

Peter Galan  
The Lance

## Super Bowl XXXVIII.

The longest name in the Super Bowl since they started using Roman numerals, and the longest that it will be until Super Bowl LXXXVIII. How appropriate that this Super Bowl was almost the longest game ever, almost the first ever Super Bowl to go to overtime. Almost. Place-kicker Adam Vinatieri and the New England Patriots had something to say about that, as they defeated the Carolina Panthers, 32-29 on a game-ending 41-yard field goal by the Pats' ice-veined Vinatieri. By Super Bowl standards, the first quarter and a half was ugly. Boring and ugly. The Patriots set the tone early, with a strong aggressive drive that showed the world why they had won 14 games in a row coming in. Tom Brady, the Michigan stud (over whom the women are now swooning across the nation), displayed the precision and strength that made him Most Valuable Player of the Super Bowl two years prior. However, his efforts went for naught, as the normally accurate Vinatieri missed a 31-yard field goal. This game, in fact, was the first time in which the Patriots failed to score on their first offensive possession in their last six games.

Fast forward to the middle of the 2nd quarter. Nothing significant happened anyways; defense was the name of the game. Neither offense did much worth mentioning in the way of moving the ball. Football is a game of making mistakes. Usually, scores come off of mistakes by the other team, whether it is bad defense or a turnover deep in their own territory (which leads to a short field with which the offense has to work). Carolina committed one of the seven deadly sins (in football, at least), by making the first mistake. The teams had traded punts for a while and through the natural progression of the game, Carolina happened to be deep in their own territory. On third and twelve at their own 28-yard line, Jake Delhomme was hit by linebacker Mike Vrabel, causing a fumble that was recovered by defensive end Richard Seymour at the Carolina 20. It then took Tom Brady and the Patriots only four plays to put the ball in the end zone, as Brady hit Deon Branch with a play-action pass for a touchdown from the 5-yard line, making the score 7-0. Worth noting was the fact that the first touchdown was scored with

3:05 left in the 2nd quarter; 26:55 being the most time it has ever taken to score a point in Super Bowl history.

After 26:55 of boredom, the game decidedly picked up. Faced with having negative yardage for the first half (-7 yards at 3:05 left in the half), Delhomme drove the Panthers 95 yards with 1:58 left, culminating with a 39-yard touchdown pass to Steve Smith. The only problem with this was the fact that there was a good amount of time left on the clock (59 seconds), and anyone who watched the Super Bowl XXXVI two years ago knows that is enough time for Brady to score. He did, running the two-minute offense just like he did in Super Bowl XXXVI, driving 78-yards in 49 seconds. David Givens caught, once again, a 5-yard play-action pass for a touchdown to make the score 14-7. But wait. The scoring wasn't over for the half! The Pats made a minor mistake, squibbing the ensuing kickoff to the 46-yard line of the Panthers and then allowing Stephen Davis to run 21 yards to the New England 33 with 12 seconds left. John Kasay capped the first-half scoring at 14-10, splitting the uprights with a 50-yard field goal.

Hey. Yo! The game is back on. Yes, that was Janet Jackson's nipple on national TV. But you know what? Who cares? There was a football game to be played.

But apparently someone forgot to tell the teams involved in said game, as the second half was a replay of the first. For nearly the entire third quarter, the teams traded blows without scoring points. At the end of the quarter, however, New England started to move. Brady started to pick his spots, hitting his wide receivers with precision passes, and running backs Antowain Smith and Kevin Faulk started to chew up yardage. That led to the Carolina defense being worried about the run, so Brady was able to complete a 33-yard pass of the play-action variety, going from the Carolina 41 to the 8. Smith closed the drive with a 2 yard run up the middle on the second play of the 4th quarter, making the score 21-10.

The game was in danger of getting out of control for the Panthers, so they did the only thing they could: went to the hurry-up offense, getting the offense to the line quickly and trying to catch the defense off guard. It worked, as Delhomme looked like the quarterback that led the

Panthers to 3 straight playoff wins and a division crown, making the throws that needed to be made at the times they needed to be made. And just when they had the Patriots back on their heels, expecting pass, Delhomme handed off on a draw play to DeShaun Foster. He got into the secondary and ran for a crucial 33-yard touchdown. Even more crucial was the play afterwards.

Remember how I said the Panthers were desperate? Head coach John Fox made a controversial decision to go for 2, down 21-16, to try to pull them to 3 points, even though there was plenty of time left in the game. They failed, and the score remained 21-16. Remember those points. Remember how it could have been 21-17.

Speaking of remembering, remember how I said football was a game of mistakes? Tom Brady and the Patriots hadn't made too many as of 7:48 left in the 4th quarter, but that changed with one play. On third-and-goal from the Carolina 9, Brady made a bad decision: he threw off his back foot into double coverage. For those who don't watch football, that is like not studying for your test and showing up 45 minutes late (in a 50 minute class): really really stupid. Reggie Howard intercepted Brady's ill-advised pass and returned it to the Carolina 12, giving the Panthers new life for real. Instead of being down 28-16, 24-16 at the least, it was still 21-16 with plenty of time left on the clock. Carolina took full advantage of the opportunity, and in quick fashion, as Delhomme nailed a streaking Muhsin Muhammad up the sideline for an 85-yard touchdown pass on the third play of the drive. The Panthers once again went for two, and once again failed, making the score 22-21. Remember that point and the point that would have gone on this score if Carolina made the safe play.

We knew New England was a dominating team. They had won 14 games in a row coming into the Bowl, and while not in overpowering fashion, they won and won and won. In fact, at 6:53 of the 4th quarter, the Patriots were trailing for the first time in over 8 full games! It was the first time they had trailed since November 23, in that same stadium, against the Houston Texans. If you have a long memory (as sports fans are wont to do), you will remember that the Pats came back to win that game.

So, working from an unfamiliar position, Brady, being the scientist he is, went to work. He put the team in a spread offense, running 4 and 5 wide receivers out at a time. With the space and time he was given, he was able to pick the Carolina secondary apart. On a dominating 11 play, 68 yard drive that took 4:02 off the clock, Brady went 5-8 for 57 yards, culminating with (gasp!) a play action pass to special-duties linebacker Mike Vrabel, playing one of his first offensive snaps of the season. Vrabel caught the 1-yard touchdown pass with 2:51 left, and the Pats then went for and succeeded in getting a two point conversion, running Kevin Faulk up the middle to make the score 29-22.

Remember those points.....

As the Panthers' next drive started, I thought to myself, "The Panthers have to score a touchdown, but they can't do it too fast. They can't give Brady too much time to work with at the end of the game to get another game-winning field goal set up." Guess what they did. Delhomme ran the hurry-up to perfection, converting 5 of 6 passes and running the ball in chunks when needed. When he found Ricky Proehl in the end zone for a 12-yard touchdown and converted the point-after-attempt to knot the score at 29, I looked at the clock. It said 1:08. I said, "Uh-oh." (Are you remembering those points that should have been scored???)

I know this is a really long article, and I have given you a lot to remember, but again I say, football is a game of making mistakes. And on the final kick-off, John Kasay made the unforgivable mistake of kicking the ball out of bounds. To prevent teams from doing that every time and pinning their opponent deep in their own end of the field, the NFL instituted a rule that says the receiving team gets the ball on their own 40-yard line if the kickoff goes out of bounds. So, with a tie game, and 1:08 on the clock, the Patriots and their poster-child of success QB Tom Brady had 1:08 to move the ball approximately 35 yards, to get in the comfort zone of Vinatieri. The first play was run to perfection, as Brady found a wide-open Troy Brown for 13 yards, putting the ball at the Carolina 47. The Patriots were called for offensive pass interference on the next play, setting them up at their own 43. Brady made up for his teammate's