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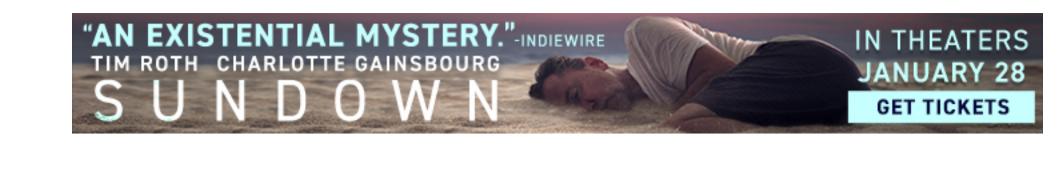
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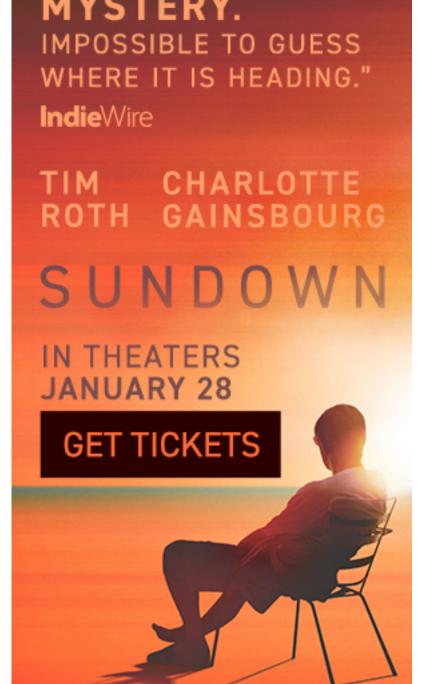
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'It's Better to Be Feared' Review: The Gridiron's Greatest Duo? Tom Brady and Bill Belichick achieved something historic with the New England Patriots. A look back at their twinned story.





"AN EXISTENTIAL

By Edward Kosner Feb. 10, 2022 6:28 pm ET

PHOTO: STEVEN SENNE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tom Brady and Bill Belichick in 2018.

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After an astonishing 20-year run with Bill Belichick's New England Patriots, Tom Brady

the greatest pro-football quarterback of all time.

weakness for cheating to gain advantage.

Listen to article (6 minutes)

won his seventh championship ring last year, at the age of 43, as he led the Tampa Bay Buccaneers over the Kansas City Chiefs. Then he almost swamped interest in this year's big game when news of his retirement was leaked, denied, then finally announced. The media frenzy Brady touched off confirmed, as if any confirmation were needed, that he is indeed

Oscar: sleek, adroit Brady, with his highlighted hair and highlight reel of touchdown passes; and grumpy, dumpy Belichick, a gridiron genius in a schlumpy hoodie with the sleeves cut off at the biceps and a spectacular record on the sidelines. Their twinned story —as much soap opera as sports saga—is told in Seth Wickersham's "It's Better to Be Feared: The New England Patriots Dynasty and the Pursuit of Greatness." It's a superlative sports book full of intimate, fly-on-the-wall reporting, savvy insights and deft, pageturning writing.

Some sports fans may be familiar with Brady's regular season, playoff and Super Bowl

percentage; 8,428 completed passes for 97,569 yards and 710 touchdowns; seven Super

Bowl wins and five Super Bowl MVPs in 10 tries. Belichick, who has been a head coach for 27

statistics and assume he had it made from he start: 278 victories for a .766 winning

Brady and Belichick are the NFL's odd couple—as disparate and symbiotic as Felix and

years—longer than any other active NFL coach—has won 290 regular-season games (all but 36 of them with the Patriots) and lost 143. The author, a writer at ESPN, calls Brady "a transcendent figure—not only an incomparable athlete, but a celebrity and member of the global elite." And he proclaims Belichick "the greatest coach in modern NFL history for many reasons." But this is hardly a dual hagiography. Brady's vanity, rage and obsessive perfection rituals are on full display. So, too, are Belichick's secrecy, ruthless dispatch of fading players, manipulative tricks and

bodied and slow, Brady clawed his way up the depth chart at Michigan, then was passed over in the 2000 NFL draft until Belichick chose him with the 199th pick. That was Belichick's first year as the Patriots' head coach. Previously his first and only NFL headcoaching job was with the Cleveland Browns, from 1991 to 1995, after years as an assistant. He compiled a mediocre 36-44 record with the Browns before being fired.

Brady's glittering career on and off the field unfolds in pointillist detail: his romance with

the movie star Bridget Moynahan, who gave birth to their son after they'd broken up; his

Mr. Wickersham documents how both men

overcame nay-sayers to reach the top. Dad-

long marriage to Gisele Bündchen, who retired from her supermodel career to be a football superstar's wife and the mother of their two kids; his struggle to unseat Drew Bledsoe as the Pats' quarterback. Many of Brady's electrifying 53 game-winning drives are recounted, along with the glory of his perfect 16-0 season in 2007—and the heartbreak of defeat that year by Eli Manning's New York Giants in the Super Bowl. And there are his years of punishing training with an odd fitness guru and a baseball

teams' signals and practices—and his involvement in the fiasco over deflated footballs, which led to his four-game suspension in 2016. The two scandals also shadow Belichick's record **GRAB A COPY** but were integral to it. "To win football games, you sometimes had to be less than honest," Mr. It's Better to Be Feared: The New England

pitching coach; his dietary regimen, including avocado ice cream, and his TB12 wellness

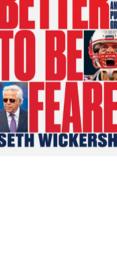
program; his embarrassment over the Patriots' Spygate scandal—secretly taping other

Greatness By Seth Wickersham

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keep secrets...be unafraid of using people... hold grudges." No edge was too small to seek. At home games, radio contact between the visiting coaches and their quarterback would mysteriously cut out. Gatorade for the visiting team would be served lukewarm. For Belichick, pro football was simply another iteration of human nature: Detect and expose an opponent's psychological or physical weakness and turn it against him. Without Mr. Brady, whether because of injury or suspension, the Patriots were a .500 team. Still, the Belichick Way led to endless friction with the star quarterback, who felt unappreciated, and with the team's owner, Robert Kraft, a mogul pal of Donald Trump's. Mr. Trump himself has a couple of cameos in the book. Before Brady married Gisele, the

Wickersham writes. "You had to manipulate...

author reports, the future president tried to fix him up with his daughter Ivanka. And during Sen. Arlen Specter's Spygate investigation in 2008, Mr. Wickersham says, the "Apprentice" host told Specter he was calling for his friend Mr. Kraft and that "if you laid

off the Patriots, there'd be a lot of money in Palm Beach." Specter blew him off.

Chapter after chapter, the author takes the reader inside the Patriots' locker and trainers' rooms, into coaches' meetings, into the huddle and onto the line of scrimmage. There's plenty of eavesdropping on the NFL owners' contentious meetings with Commissioner Roger Goodell, too. The result is the best picture I've ever encountered of what the cutthroat, multibillion-dollar world of NFL football is actually like.

"The end of my playing career," Brady replied. Now he'll find out if he was right. Mr. Kosner is the author of "Its News to Me," a memoir of his career as the editor of

After his third Super Bowl victory in 2005, Brady was interviewed by Steve Kroft on "60

Newsweek, New York magazine, Esquire and the New York Daily News. Advertisement - Scroll to Continue Appeared in the February 11, 2022, print edition as 'The Gridiron's Greatest Duo?.'

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Minutes." "Anything that really scares you?" Mr. Kroft asked.

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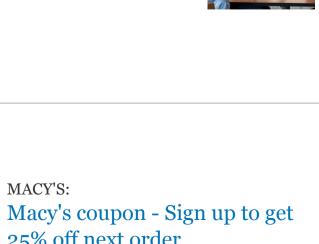
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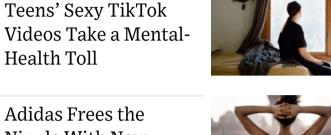
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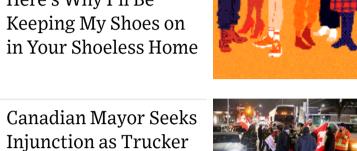
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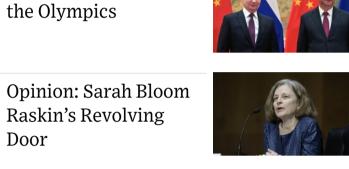
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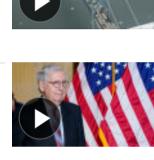
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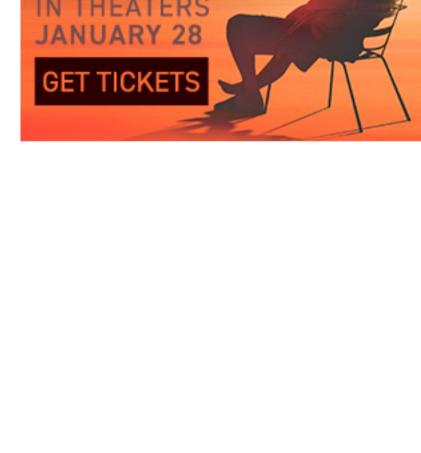
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