



FOOTBALL

Leaving behind a legacy like no other



MARK HUMPHREY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady holds his daughter, Vivian, after defeating the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl LIII on Feb. 3, 2019, at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

Brady clears the air, officially announces retirement from NFL

ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Tom Brady, the most successful quarterback in NFL history, has retired after winning seven Super Bowls and setting numerous passing records in an unprecedented 22-year career.

“This is difficult for me to write, but here it goes: I am not going to make that competitive commitment anymore,” Brady wrote in a lengthy post on Instagram. “I have loved my NFL career, and now it is time to focus my time and energy on other

things that require my attention.” Brady has long stated his desire to spend more time with his wife, supermodel Gisele Bündchen, and three children despite still playing at the top of his game.

The 44-year-old Brady goes out after leading the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to a Super Bowl title last season and NFC South championship this season.

News of Brady’s pending retirement leaked Saturday. His family and the Buccaneers denied that he had made a final decision, and he said Monday night on his SiriusXM podcast he wasn’t ready to finalize his plans.

That came Tuesday morning. “I’ve done a lot of reflecting the past week and have asked myself difficult questions,” Brady said. “And I am so proud

of what we have achieved. My teammates, coaches, fellow competitors, and fans deserve 100% of me, but right now, it’s best I leave the field of play to the next generation of dedicated and committed athletes.”

Brady thanked the Buccaneers organization, his teammates, ownership, general manager Jason Licht, coach Bruce Arians, his trainer Alex Guerrero, agents Don Yee and Steve Dubin and his family in his nine-page post. He didn’t mention the New England Patriots, where he spent his first 20 seasons and won six Super Bowls. Of course, Brady thanked the Patriots and coach Bill Belichick after he left the team to sign with the Buccaneers

Please see **BRADY**, Page C4

BASEBALL

The big time at last

Racine native May earns coveted status, becomes a full-time major league umpire

PETER JACKEL
peter.jackel@journaltimes.com

Ben May doesn’t remember much about when he was informed that he was being hired to the fulltime major league umpire staff on Jan. 3.

Yeah, right. All he remembers is that it was 5:51 p.m. that Monday and he was driving north on Water Street toward his apartment in Milwaukee. He had taken a COVID test in Franklin that afternoon. And then he and his girlfriend, Briana Lipor, had just picked up some burgers and salads from Camino on their way home for a relaxing dinner.

May, a 2000 graduate of St. Catherine’s High School, wasn’t asked what the precise temperature was in Milwaukee at that time, but it’s a good bet he would know. One just doesn’t forget a moment of that magnitude.

After grinding through every summer as an umpire since 2007 and being shuffled between the minor and major leagues since 2014, May finally achieved his elusive dream at 5:51 on Jan. 3.

That’s when, Rich Rieker, head of supervisors for Major League Baseball, placed an initially garbled cellphone call to May and playfully tugged at his chain for a few minutes before connecting him with Michael Hill, senior vice president of on-field operations for Major League Baseball.

Hill’s exact words, as May recalled them were, “Pending your physical, you are conditionally hired for Major League Baseball

Please see **MAY**, Page C4



MARK HERTZBERG, SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL TIMES

Ben May operates as the home plate umpire in an exhibition game between the Kansas City Royals and Milwaukee Brewers at Miller Park in Milwaukee on March 29, 2014.

The Ben May File

BORN: Jan. 23, 1982 with two brother Bill, who was born 17 minutes after Ben. They are the youngest of seven siblings and were born nine years after the next oldest, Ann.

FATHER: May’s father, Jim, started on St. Catherine’s 1958 and ‘59 state championship teams. They were the first two state championships won by John McGuire, for whom St. Catherine’s gymnasium has been named. Jim May was also starting quarterback for the Racine Raiders in 1964 and ‘65, the only two seasons he played minor league football. The Raiders went undefeated those two seasons.

EDUCATION: Ben May graduated from St. Catherine’s in 2000 and earned a degree in sociology from Marquette in 2005.

WISCONSIN FOOTBALL

Signing Day likely to be low key for Badgers

COLTEN BARTHOLOMEW
Lee Newspapers

Wednesday’s National Signing Day is likely to be a quiet day for the University of Wisconsin football team as it frequently is becoming for the Badgers.

UW’s 2022 recruiting class could add a new member from the high school ranks, but the bulk of the class already has signed their letters of intent to play for the Badgers. The class of 15 scholarship players ranks 47th in the country and 12th in the Big Ten Conference on 247Sports, while Rivals has it at 44th and 13th, respectively. The Badgers also have added five transfers to the roster this offseason and have 10 walk-ons committed. A recruiting dead period is in effect throughout the month of February, so UW coaches won’t be permitted in-person contact with recruits.

Here are a few things for Badgers fans to know heading into National Signing Day.

Another cornerback possibility?

UW is still in the mix for three-star cornerback Avery Powell out of Jersey City, New Jersey.

The 5-foot-9, 170-pound prospect has UW among his top six options, along with Nebraska, Mississippi State, Mississippi and Penn State. He’s expected to sign his NLI on Wednesday.

Powell’s speed and ability to close distance on receivers when the ball is in the air stand out.

Powell would be the sixth cornerback to join the Badgers this cycle if he chooses UW. The Badgers landed three senior cornerbacks in the transfer portal and already have two high school commits — A’Khoury Lyde and Avyonne Jones. UW lost three corners to graduation or transfer this season but has loaded up on options at the position.

Fallout from Caleb Williams’ decision

Transfer quarterback Caleb Williams announced Tuesday his decision to attend Southern California, but Badgers fans were on the edge of their seats for weeks waiting on Williams’ call. Williams had narrowed his field to Southern California and UW, according to a Monday report from On3Sports.

Multiple Lee Newspapers sources indicated UW’s

Please see **BADGERS**, Page C4

BEARS

A new era begins for the Bears

Poles and Eberflus make their debuts and plans for future

GENE CHAMBERLAIN
Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — The Chicago Bears are intent on taking a different approach under new coach Matt Eberflus and general manager Ryan Poles.

Stating this and accomplishing it can be separate situations, as the Bears have discovered in the past.

“We’re gonna build through the draft,” Poles said Monday. “We’re gonna acquire young, fast and physical football players. We’re gonna be selective

through free agency. And we’re gonna connect evaluation with valuation.”

The same was often said by the previous Ryan and Matt in charge of the Bears, coach Matt Nagy and GM Ryan Pace, who were fired after a 6-11 season.

However, when the new Bears coach and GM held their first news conference with reporters at Halas Hall, they made it clear they are more about process than promises. Both spoke at length about laying a foundation for success.

“It’s always about the why equals winning,” Eberflus said.

Eberflus served as Frank Reich’s defensive coordinator for

Please see **BEARS**, Page C4



NAM Y. HUH, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chicago Bears head coach Matt Eberflus, left, and general manager Ryan Poles pose for photo during an introductory news conference at Halas Hall in Lake Forest, Ill. on Monday.

May

From C1

in the umpiring department.”

May, who 20 days away from his 40th birthday at the time, then breathed a sigh of relief to end all signs of relief.

“It means the world,” May said. “I’ve been working for this job ever since I was a little kid. I started at age 15, but honestly, I’ve been umpiring and officiating in my neighborhood for the pickup games well before that.”

Bill Topp, longtime Chief Operating Officer and Executive Editor at Referee Magazine in Racine, made it clear how much of a challenge it is for anyone aspiring to be a major league umpire.

“Getting to the big leagues as an umpire is a long and challenging process,” Topp wrote in an email Tuesday afternoon. “It often takes more than a decade. Just like many players, umpires start at the low minor leagues and work their way up.

“In some ways, it’s more difficult to make it as an umpire than as a player. There are only 95 or so MLB umpire jobs. Those jobs generally only open up when an MLB umpire retires or dies. Some years, there are no new hires. Other years, a few. You have to have tremendous perseverance, knowing your chances to make it are very slim.

“Like many Triple A umpires, Ben’s career was at the crossroads. He has been getting many MLB assignments as a minor league call-up umpire when the MLB umpires are injured or on vacation. So he’s getting the experience. And he knows he’s good enough to get those assignments. But if MLB doesn’t promote you at some point, you are released as a minor league umpire so others can move up the ladder. That is a precarious time for any umpire going through it. You’re so close, yet in some ways, so far. Ben hung in there and didn’t give up. Now, he’s getting the opportunity that he has earned.”

And then came Jan. 3, a day May questioned at times would ever come.

“It was 5:51 when they called, so I wasn’t actually expecting a call even though they told us that they were going to call on Jan. 3,” said May, who declined to discuss his promotion until he passed his physical. “Five fifty one here is 6:51 on the east coast, so I wasn’t expecting a call anymore. I just figured, ‘Who knows when they’re going to do it?’

“When it happened, it actually was a surprise. They called while I was driving and, initially, I couldn’t even hear what Rich was saying because I was in a bad cell zone or something. So I freaked out.

“Briana was sitting next to me and she saw the fear and dread on my face. It was a very scary moment for me, so I pulled over once I got



MARK HERTZBERG, SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL TIMES

Ben May operates as the home plate umpire in an exhibition game between the Kansas City Royals and Milwaukee Brewers at Miller Park in Milwaukee on March 29, 2014.

“In some ways, it’s more difficult to make it as an umpire than as a player. There are only 95 or so MLB umpire jobs. Those jobs generally only open up when an MLB umpire retires or dies. Some years, there are no new hires. Other years, a few. You have to have tremendous perseverance, knowing your chances to make it are very slim.”

Bill Topp, Referee Magazine

into some cell service that was better, and he started just bull—ing, like, ‘Oh, how is it going?’ He talked for a like a minute or two and he was about to hang up and then he said, ‘Oh, wait a minute. Before I go, I’ve got a couple of other guys on the phone who want to speak to you.’”

It is not known whether May is the first Racine native to be named a fulltime major league umpire. But Paul Pryor, a National League umpire from 1961-81 who died in 1995, lived in Racine for several years so he could more easily make the commute to Milwaukee and Chicago.

Now that May has achieved this level of umpiring, there will be plenty of perks. He will receive vacation during the season that is automatically built into his schedule. Umpires who haven’t reached fulltime status do not receive vacation.

His health insurance is improved, although May adds that, ‘I wouldn’t knock minor league health insurance.’ Fulltime major league umpires receive a salary that is significantly more than at the minor league level.

And for the first time in his umpiring career, May will have a set schedule. If not for the ongoing Major League Baseball lockout, his schedule already would have been released and May would know when and where he would be all season.

After May his first major league game on April 17,

2014 — he was the third-base umpire for a game between the Minnesota Twins and Toronto Blue Jays in Minneapolis — he was shuffled back and fourth between the minor and major leagues every season. To say the least, it was grueling.

“You would go from Pittsburgh to Rochester, N.Y., to Baltimore to Syracuse,” May said. As the seasons passed, May saw more time in the major leagues. But going up and down still wore on him, even last season when he worked just one week in the minor leagues.

“I worked one week in Toledo last year and, on my last game, I worked the plate,” May said. “It was a four-hour game and I missed my flight to Atlanta because I had to get an X-ray on my thumb from a foul ball in the first inning. I won’t forget my last AAA game. It was painful both physically and mentally.”

May’s promotion is an enormous reward that few in his profession achieve. And the ones who do reach the major leagues do so only after enduring several grueling seasons with absolutely no guarantees.

Meanwhile, May endured several moments of occasional concern. He recalls one game at Wrigley Field several years ago when he made a questionable call that turned out to be correct. A supervisor of officials was observing that game and May couldn’t

help but wonder about his future after the game.

“There are guys who are cut loose with 700, 500 games in the major leagues as a Triple A call-up and they’re told, ‘We’re going in a different direction,’” May said. “That’s happened many times.”

But May now has job security, especially considering there is very little turnover among major league umpires. A position for May opened up only after the retirements of Joe West, Brian Gorman, Gerry Davis, Fieldin Culbreth and Kerwin Danley.

Those five spent a combined 171 seasons in the major leagues.

“Up to this point, if I would have been let go, that would have been it,” May said. “I didn’t have any type of retirement or payment plan that they would have made for me. I would have just been cut loose.

“So this is huge for me, obviously. And there’s having the security of being in the umpire union as well. It’s a lot stronger than the union I was a member of this prior to this, which was a minor league one.”

Not that May has this security, how long could he see himself continuing?

“I want to work as long as I can,” he said. “I would love to get to the World Series. The next step is to work the playoffs.

“But how long? I don’t know. That kind of remains to be seen.”

Whatever ends up happening, May is a rare breed.

“There have been very few MLB umpires from Wisconsin, and to the best of our knowledge, none that have been raised in the Racine area,” Topp wrote.

“Local umpires are so excited for him. It shows any young person from here considering getting into officiating that there can be life-changing opportunities ahead. Ben is an inspiration.”

Bears

From C1

four years in Indianapolis and seemed a curious hire considering the greatest Bears problems for decades have been on offense. Plus, they are trying to break in a new quarterback in Justin Fields.

Fields remains a point of emphasis.

“I remember watching Justin (in college) a lot,”

Poles said. “I’m close with Ryan Day as well, the head coach of Ohio State. And like any player, support and development,

getting back to the details, doing the fundamentals and taking the approach to reach that ceiling, and that’s hard and that’s detail. And I’m excited to see him grow.”

Fields has no problem playing for a head coach from the defensive side of the ball.

“I really just like the way he carries himself,” Fields said. “Just his demeanor, I feel like his presence — he’s confident when he talks, he knows what he wants to do, he has a plan set in stone, and I’m just ready to lead with him and just get ready for next year.”

To help in that regard Eberflus hired Packers quarterbacks coach Luke Getsy as offensive coordinator.

“He’s special because he’s tough, innovative, smart and he works well with team,” Eberflus said. “He’s a big team guy, so I’m excited about where he is. He’s been on my radar for a while.”

On the other side of the ball, Eberflus plans to bring in a 4-3 defensive scheme, but won’t be calling the plays himself. His defensive coordinator hire will be important.

“I do believe that to be the head football coach and

be efficient at that, you are exactly the head football coach, so I can be involved in all aspects of the game,” Eberflus said. “So the defensive coordinator we hire will call the defensive plays. I will not do that.”

The defense they will install is drastically different from the 3-4 the Bears played over the past seven seasons. It reverts to a style they used for over a decade under coach Lovie Smith, the most recent time the team went to a Super Bowl 16 years ago.

“And we want to bring that same style here, to encompass what we’re doing,” Eberflus said. “In terms of hitting, taking the ball away, playing with maximum intensity and being smart about how we do it.”

The Colts finished top 10 during the past four years in takeaways under Eberflus, and were second this season. The Bears have struggled to get takeaways over the past three seasons.

Whatever they do strategically, they’ll still need more talent. The team Eberflus and Poles take over has only one of the top five wide receivers under contract for 2022, and finished 30th in passing in 2021.

However, it wouldn’t be a surprise if some of their offseason moves involved the offensive line first. The Bears allowed more sacks (59) than any NFL team.

In that regard, it helps having a GM from Kansas City’s front office who once signed with the Bears as an undrafted free agent, and played tackle at Boston College.

“I think it starts with the foundation of the offensive line and establishing that run game, which then leads to explosive plays,” Poles said. “We have to continue to work on that, get that to a level and I think you will see more points scored and more efficiency, more explosive plays, everything plays off that.”

“So that’s going to be a focal point.”

Badgers

From C1

likelihood of landing the former Oklahoma Sooners quarterback diminished over the weekend and Williams is now reuniting with former coach Lincoln Riley at USC.

For the Badgers, who hired offensive coordinator Bobby Engram last week, there could be some fences to mend with quarterbacks on the roster after they courted a transfer.

A commitment flip

Chris Brooks Jr., a 6-foot-3 wide receiver from St. Louis, flipped his commitment from Yale to UW on Tuesday, a move that eliminated one of the few mysteries for the Badgers heading into signing day.

The 210-pound target

had been committed to Yale since July, but he took a visit to UW in late January and that sealed his choice to join the Badgers. He fits the body type that UW receivers coach Alvis Whitted has been targeting in recruits and is the fourth scholarship receiver the Badgers would add this cycle. He joins high school prospects Tommy McIntosh and Vinny Anthony, and UCLA transfer Keontez Lewis as UW’s scholarship receivers in the class so far.

Brooks Jr. has strong hands at the point of the catch and boxes out defenders well. He’s also a willing blocker, another key for Whitted’s targets.



Brooks Jr.

Brady

From C1

two years ago.

Brady said he’s still figuring out how he’ll spend his time, but he plans to be involved in his TB12 health and wellness company, Brady clothing line and NFT company.

“I know for sure I want to spend a lot of time giving to others and trying to enrich other people’s lives, just as so many have done for me,” he said.

Brady led the NFL in yards passing (5,316), touchdowns (43), completions (485) and attempts (719) in 2021, but the Buccaneers lost at home to the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional round.

Brady leaves as the career leader in yards passing (84,520) and TDs (624). He’s the only player to win more than five Super Bowls and was MVP of the game five times.

Widely considered the greatest quarterback to



STEVE LUCIANO, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tampa Bay Buccaneers tight end Rob Gronkowski and quarterback Tom Brady celebrate after defeating the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LV at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Fla., on Feb. 7, 2021.

play the game, Brady won three NFL MVP awards, was a first-team All-Pro three times and was selected to the Pro Bowl 15 times. He was 243-73 in his career in the regular season and 35-12 in the playoffs.

“To finish a 22-year career while still performing

at his peak was nothing short of extraordinary,” Licht said. “I wish we had more time with Tom, but I understand and respect his decision to leave the game in order to spend more time with his family.”

Brady went from 199th pick in the 2000 draft to

replacing an injured Drew Bledsoe in 2001 and leading New England to a Super Bowl victory over the heavily favored Rams that season.

Brady led the Patriots to consecutive Super Bowl titles following the 2003-04 seasons. No team has since repeated as champions.

But New England wouldn’t win another one for a decade, twice losing to the New York Giants in the Super Bowl, including a 17-14 defeat on Feb. 3, 2008, that prevented the Patriots from completing a perfect season.

Brady earned his fourth ring after the 2014 season. Two years later, in the biggest Super Bowl comeback, he led the Patriots out of a 28-3 deficit in the third quarter against Atlanta to win in overtime for No. 5. Brady got his sixth championship when New England beat the Rams following the 2018 season.

He joined the Buccaneers in 2020 amid a pandemic, instantly transforming a

franchise that hadn’t won a playoff game in 18 years. His buddy Rob Gronkowski came out of retirement to join him and they helped the Buccaneers become the first team to play in a Super Bowl in its stadium.

“He set a standard and helped create a culture that took our team to the mountaintop,” Arians said.

Brady reached the playoffs 19 times, won 18 division titles, went 10-4 in conference championships and 7-3 in Super Bowls.

After starting his first game on Sept. 30, 2001, Brady was under center for every game except when he suffered a season-ending knee injury in Week 1 in 2008 and the first four games in 2016 when he sat out a suspension because of the deflated footballs scandal.

“An incredible competitor and leader, his stellar career is remarkable for its longevity but also for the sustained excellence he displayed year after year,”

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement.

Known for his work ethic, intense exercise regimen and strict diet, Brady was better with age.

After turning 37, Brady won four Super Bowls and was 17-4 in the playoffs. He was 95-30, completed 65.2% of his passes for 35,371 yards, 265 TDs, 69 interceptions and 100.2 passer rating in the regular season in those eight seasons.

“I have always believed the sport of football is an ‘all-in’ proposition — if a 100% competitive commitment isn’t there, you won’t succeed, and success is what I love so much about our game,” Brady said. “There is a physical, mental, and emotional challenge every single day that has allowed me to maximize my highest potential. And I have tried my very best these past 22 years. There are no shortcuts to success on the field or in life.”