

Lessons from the NFL AFC Championship

<https://www.patriots.com/news/new-england-patriots-postgame-transcripts-1-20>

I know many people outside of New England are tired of seeing the New England Patriots playing in the Super Bowl. There are a lot of reasons why the Pats dominate so much but I believe we can apply a couple things Tom Brady said in the [post-game interview](#) of the 2019 NFL's AFC Championship (in which the New England Patriots beat the Kansas City Chiefs 37-31). We can apply these ideas not just to sports but how we live. I've provided his response to a reporter's question with key words in bold.

Q: How do you stay so calm in the biggest moments, especially when your team is down and you have to drive the team right back?

BRADY: "Part of playing sports is just **staying in the moment**. We always say **one play at a time and you can't make up for things that happen in the past. You just have to think about what you are going to do moving forward**. Start of the fourth quarter, they scored. We are up three to start the fourth quarter. What a **great opportunity** to be against this team and to be ahead three in the fourth quarter with a chance to win is pretty sweet. They blew so many teams out this year. It is just a **great opportunity** for us, and we took advantage of it."

His first point, staying in the moment, is key. I've seen players and teams get desperate or angry when losing or when calls go against them then try for plays or shots that aren't part of their normal repertoire. They're upset about what just happened then try to make up for it by hitting the ball harder or going for shots they don't "own." For instance, in tennis (the sport with which I'm most familiar because I play it almost daily) I've seen players go for a shot or an angle that they normally wouldn't try if they were ahead. Instead, they often end up making an unforced error, which only makes things worse. (I know because I've done it!)

As Brady says it's better to forget about past mistakes or calls that go against you and focus on two things: stay in the moment while thinking of what you're going to do next. One tip I use in tennis after making a mistake is to tell myself, "Next time" while making a couple

shadow swings on how I wanted to hit the shot that I just missed. "Next time" means I'm telling myself I'll do it better the next time I have the chance. This attitude implicitly represents a focus on the process rather than the results. It also reflects their confidence in themselves. And, it also means that their self-esteem isn't tied to the outcome. Sure, it doesn't feel good to lose but someone like Brady or Federer just use the loss as motivation to learn from what happened and try to improve. (This also reflects something I've written about in a previous post: the difference between having a growth mind-set rather than a fixed mind-set.)

Later Brady said that the Pats had a "great opportunity" when starting the fourth quarter with a three point lead over a team that was seeded #1 and had beaten other teams by large margins. I find it interesting that he didn't say it was a challenge or that they were nervous. This is one of the qualities I've noticed with champions like the Brady, the Patriots or, switching to tennis again, Roger Federer. They are unflappable. They see facing a tough opponent as an opportunity to excel rather than a challenge for which they might not be good enough.

So what accounts for this calmness? I'd say these factors: focus on the present, confidence in yourself without tying the outcome to your self-esteem and a process-oriented mentality.