

New Orleans a special place for Brees and Manning

By RAHUL VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Staff

The starting quarterbacks for Sunday's Super Bowl both have a special relationship with the city of New Orleans.

Indianapolis QB and four-time NFL MVP Peyton Manning was born in New Orleans in 1976. His father Archie, quarterbacked the New Orleans Saints for 11 seasons.

Drew Brees's love for his adopted home, New Orleans, as QB for the Saints is truly admirable.

Devastated by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, New Orleans was a city submerged in one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history. Over 1,800 people were reported to have lost their lives.

A colossal rebuilding effort took place with the damaged Louisiana Superdome becoming a refuge for those who had lost their homes.

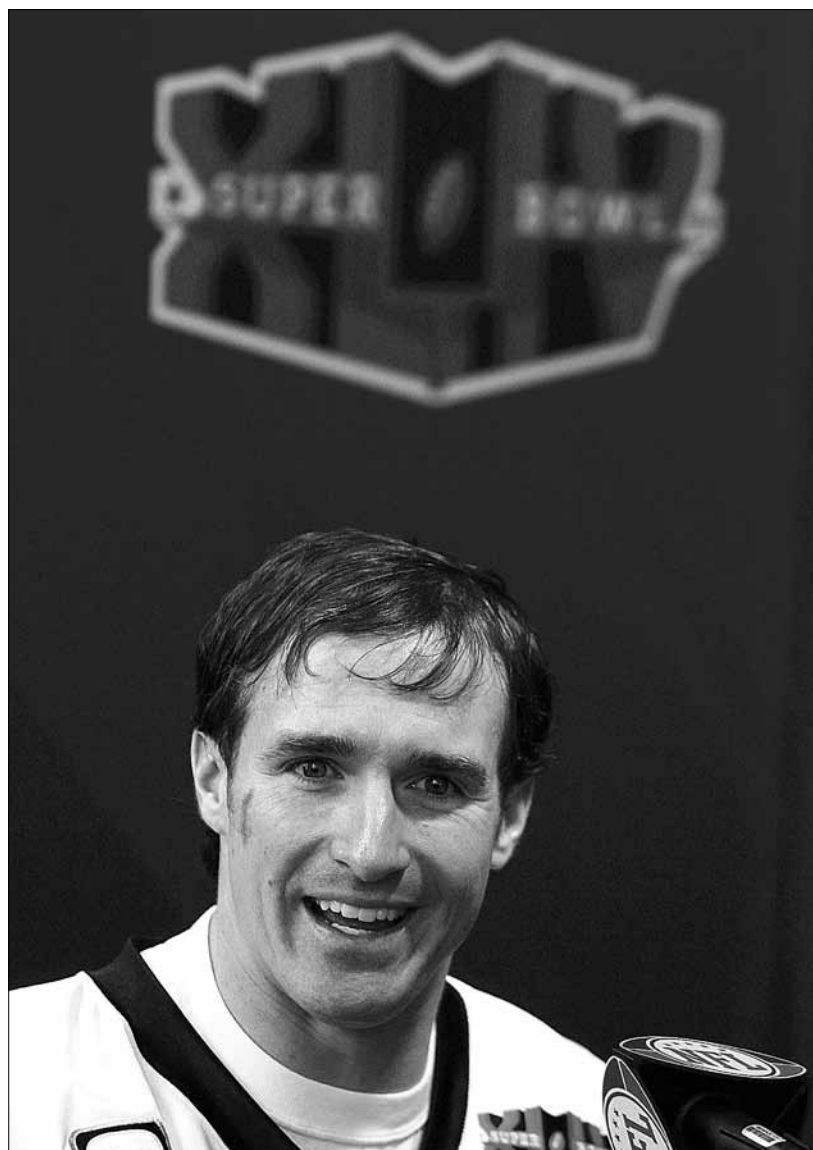
"What Drew, and really the entire Saints team have meant to that community, has been extremely impressive. Being a fellow New Orleanian, I certainly appreciate it," said Manning in a Super Bowl XLIV media week interview.

"You certainly appreciate that, people adopting a city as their hometown, putting their monies and efforts behind it. Drew has spearheaded that."

"Our success as a team over the last four years, but especially this year, has been tremendous just in regards to giving so many of the members of that community hope and lifting their spirits," said Brees.

The Saints began the season 13-0 and hosted their first ever NFC Championship game at the Louisiana Superdome.

Brees is acutely aware of the continuing difficulties facing the people of New Orleans. "There is still a lot of work to be done there in regards



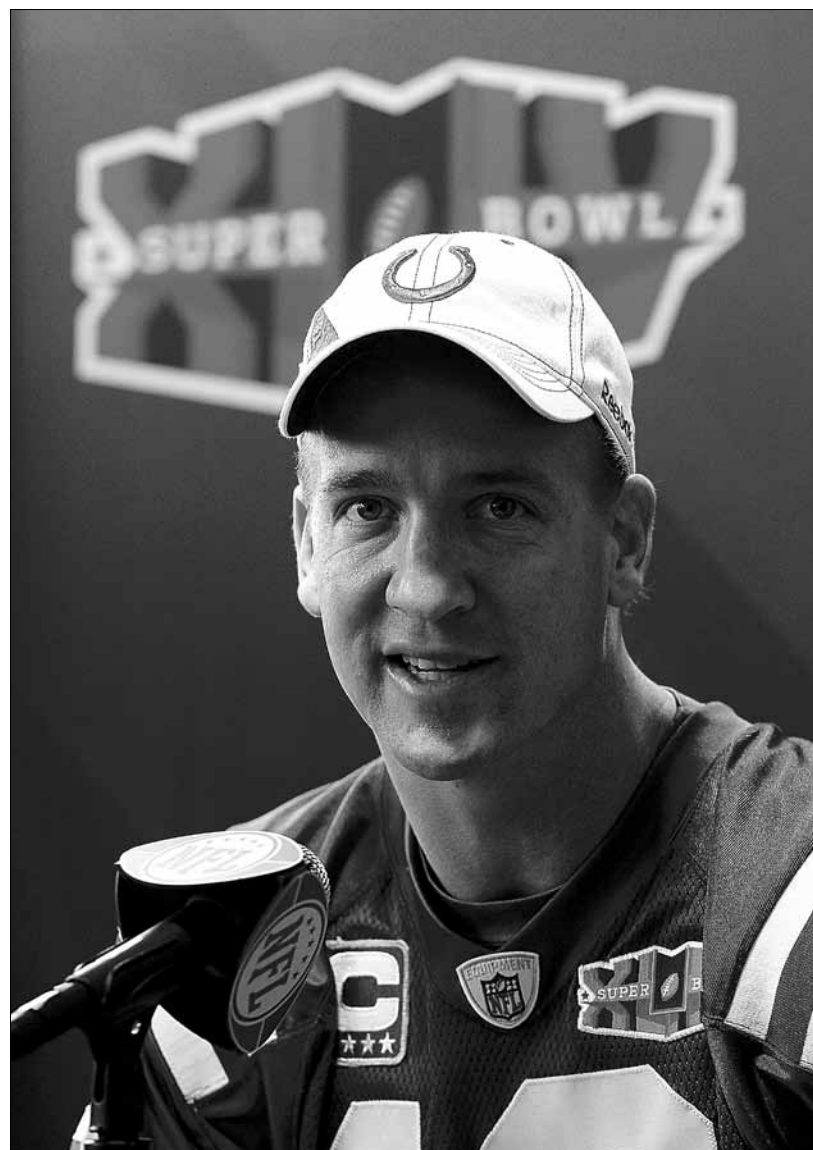
SAINTS QB: Drew Brees explained at length his bond with the city of New Orleans. DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

to the rebuilding and the recovery post-Katrina. There are still a lot of people in some pretty dire straits," he said.

"For us to be able to have the success we're having, it just does so

much for that community as far as bringing everyone together."

Saints head coach Sean Payton spoke about the role the Saints have played in the rejuvenation of the city of New Orleans.



COLTS QB: Peyton Manning knows his high school buddies will be pulling for the Saints. SCOTT HALLERAN/GETTY IMAGES

"After Katrina and the devastation, for them [citizens of New Orleans] to be able to hang their hat on one common, consistent thing, and for that product to be successful was very important," said Payton on Monday.

But for Brees, reaching the Super Bowl is critical to giving hope to the people of New Orleans.

"I have met season-ticket holders since New Orleans started in 1967. For so many of them, just to have

waited so long through so many tough times to this point, and what people went through in New Orleans post-Katrina, it's so much more than just a game to us," he said.

"It's a feeling that we have an opportunity to give them so much hope, lift their spirits and give them something they deserve."

Brees adopted New Orleans and New Orleans adopted Brees. His charitable work through the Brees Dream Foundation has raised or committed \$3 million dollars to New Orleans.

"I was embraced by the city in a way that I can't even describe. My wife and I had our first child in New Orleans a year ago, so it seems like so many things beyond football, from the standpoint of our family," said Brees.

"My wife and I felt like a part of the community quickly because of the way we were embraced by the city. I've had more people come up to me on the street who tell me, 'Thank you for being part of our city. Thank you for being a part of our community.'"

Manning and brother Eli, QB for the New York Giants, maintain close ties to their hometown, realizing the difficulties people have faced since Katrina.

"I certainly appreciate the people of New Orleans supporting me and Eli throughout our careers. That is our hometown. It is very important to us, Eli and I, that he and I continue to support New Orleans through charitable endeavors."

Manning realizes, though, his friends from Neumann High School in New Orleans will be rooting for the Saints. "I certainly understand people in New Orleans are Saints fans. They have outstanding fans, always have."

"I understand this game New Orleans people are Saints fans and I am fine with that."

Olympics breaking NHL's rhythm

Dream scenario for hockey fans

By KARL YU
Epoch Times Staff

People like to take a "glass half full" approach when looking at NHL player participation in the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics.

After all, seeing Evgeni Malkin, Alexander Ovechkin, and Ilya Kovalchuk on Team Russia; Sidney Crosby, Rick Nash, and Jonathan Toews on Team Canada; and Phil Kessel, Patrick Kane, and Zach Parise on Team USA should lead to a lot of end-to-end action.

But while the 12 days that the men's teams are taking part in the Olympic tournament will be bliss for puck fans, there will be some

side effects felt before and after by the NHL.

WEAR AND TEAR

While it is an honour for all NHLers to play for their respective national teams, they will be subjecting their bodies to more wear and tear than their NHL teammates that have the Olympics off.

Players already have to endure the rigours of an 82-game regular season schedule and the marathon that is the NHL playoffs.

If Crosby or Malkin do well in the Vancouver Olympics—let's say they both make the gold medal game and Canada and Russia have byes to the quarterfinals—and make a return trip to the Stanley Cup finals in the spring, they could play as many as 116 games. That's 82 regular season NHL games, six Olympic hockey games, and 28 playoff games if each

playoff series goes the full seven games.

THAT'S A LOT OF HOCKEY.

The Vancouver Canucks, Detroit Red Wings, and Anaheim Ducks all have seven players in the Olympics while the San Jose Sharks have a league-high eight players. Player fatigue could affect these teams most if they go on prolonged playoff runs.

The break could be beneficial to other teams who don't have many Olympians.

The Colorado Avalanche are one of the surprise teams of the NHL so far and only have three players going to the Olympics. They are one potentially playoff-bound team that can use the time off to regroup for the stretch drive.

HOMELESS WANDERERS

The host city's NHL team, the

Canucks, have been temporarily evicted from GM Place, dubbed Canada Hockey Place during the games due to advertising restrictions, in order for Olympic preparation. They will be forced to play an epic 14-game road trip that will last about six weeks, including the Olympic break.

A similar situation befell the Calgary Flames during the 1988 Winter Olympics and the team managed to go 5-5-1 during an 11-game road swing. The Flames finished with a record of 48-23-9 through 80 games and won the President's Trophy for the best record in the league.

Hockey fans are eagerly anticipating the 2010 Olympics, as it will bring the world's best players for the ice hockey tournament.

It will be a double-edged sword however as the Vancouver Games



ROAD WARRIORS: Daniel and Henrik Sedin and the Vancouver Canucks embark on a 14-game road trip due to the Olympics. ABELIMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

will condense the period for the trade deadline and parts of the schedule.

Puck fans get the best of both

worlds. They'll see super teams filled with NHL stars and have a condensed stretch run followed by the usual hockey playoffs soon after.



AERIAL GREETING: Byron Wells of Wanaka, New Zealand says, "Hello" to the crowd during the Skiing SuperPipe Elimination round of the ESPN Winter X Games 14 in Aspen, Colo. last Saturday. LISA R. ELLSMORE/THE EPOCH TIMES

Winter X Games: the Olympic incubator

By A. MUIR ELLSMORE
Epoch Times Staff

ASPEN, Colo.—The ESPN Winter X Games have a longstanding reputation for launching little-known athletes to uber-stardom in their respective sports. This media-fueled hyper-propulsion is now evident in the most timeless of sporting traditions—the Olympic Games. Some have considered the Winter Olympics an epilogue to the Winter X Games.

The Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games share three "cross-over" sports this year: half pipe, snowboard cross, and ski cross. Over half the athletes in those sports were

competing at the Winter X Games 14 in Aspen last week.

Some athletes from these sports are featured in major national marketing campaigns such as Gretchen Bleiler of Aspen and the omnipresent Shaun White of Carlsbad, Calif.

Neither of these two would have been known without the sports juggernaut ESPN shining the light in their direction. Would they have been in the Olympics without ESPN? Absolutely! Would Shaun White be sporting the Target bullseye without ESPN? Most likely not.

The hype continues to grow as the tricks and showmanship become bigger and bigger.

The progression witnessed at the

Winter X Games is something to marvel at.

In the 2010 snowboarding half pipe competition alone, the winning run included a trick with three and a half horizontal and two vertical rotations. In 2009, the winning run included three horizontal rotations and a slight vertical wobble.

The skiing Big Air competition included four tricks never performed before in competitions.

In the four years since the Turin Winter Olympics, the progression in freestyle skiing and snowboarding has been unparalleled.

What was once only done in dreams or on PlayStation is now a reality.

The ESPN Winter X Games has been the annual forum for aerial dialogue and showmanship in action sports, and is no doubt the catalyst for the mind-bending feats the whole world will witness in Vancouver.

The Winter X Games started in 1997 at Big Bear, Calif., and snowboarding was clearly the main attraction out of the five sports represented.

As the X Games matured, it traveled from California to Colorado to Vermont and has returned to Colorado and made a home in Aspen since 2002.

ESPN's 2009 telecasts of Winter X Games 13 reached an average of 942,000 homes.

Federer wins 16th grand slam title at Australian Open

By JAMES FISH
Epoch Times Staff

Switzerland's Roger Federer demonstrated that he deserves his No. 1 ranking as best in the world, beating Scotsman Andy Murray in straight sets 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 to win the Australian Open last Sunday.

The win was Federer's 16th grand slam championship, two more than any other male player. It was a record-breaking fourth Australian Open title.

"I'm over the moon, winning this again," Federer told ESPN. "I think I've played some of my best tennis in my life these last two weeks. You guys [the fans] you get the best out of me, so thanks."

"This is very special because it's my first grand slam as a father," Federer said. He is the father of six-month-old twins. "I'm looking forward to next year maybe they'll sit in the box as well on finals day."

Federer came out strong, breaking

Murray in his first service game and taking the first set 6-3. Murray fought back in the second set, but Federer was unstoppable.

Murray really upped the drama in the final set, forcing an epic 24-point tiebreaker, but Federer had the stronger serve, the more accurate forehand, and most important, the most confidence. Murray didn't make it easy, but he couldn't stop the Federer express.

Murray played too passively for

most of the match. When he attacked the ball and moved to the net, he won points. When he tried to play from behind the baseline waiting for Federer to miss, Federer attacked and took control of the point, usually winning.

The real battle was mental and emotional. Federer came in confident, while Murray came in nervous. When he lost the first set, Murray lost his confidence. He started to pump himself up in the final set, but then Federer was too close to victory, and wouldn't be denied.

Murray acknowledged Federer's dominance after the match. "I want

to congratulate Roger. His achievements in tennis are incredible, and to keep doing it year after year is pretty special. He was a lot better than me tonight so well done for that."

Murray tried to thank the fans for their support, but broke into tears halfway through.

"I'd like to thank all of you guys the support I got the whole tournament. I loved every minute. Hopefully one time I can come back and win."

Murray was playing in his second grand slam final. He lost the 2008 U.S. Open final to Federer as well.

But equally important, he was trying to become the first British tennis player since Fred Perry in 1936 to win a major title.

Murray needed several seconds to compose himself. "I can cry like Roger, it's just a shame I can't play like him. Sorry..." Federer broke into tears after losing the 2009 Australian Open final to Rafael Nadal last year.

Murray showed great skill and great heart. He was well rested coming into the final but Federer was as dominant as ever. Federer's legacy continues to grow as the greatest tennis player of all time.