

## Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022

The Greatest Of All Time (GOAT) is a very subjective tag and people's views on who should fill this category in certain fields - usually sporting - is often dependent on age. Growing up, I heard 'older' people talking of the Brazilian footballer Pele as the GOAT but I wasn't old enough to remember him so therefore I look at Lionel Messi as surely vying for the title. I happen to think that Bobby Robson is the GOAT when it comes to football managers that this country has produced but I'm blinkered by my allegiance to Ipswich; there's plenty of Man United fans who would tell me to give my head a wobble and trump me with Sir Alex Ferguson. See, it's very subjective. This week however the tag has come up not once but twice. Rafa Nadal aged 35 and on crutches a few months ago came from two sets down to win his second Australian Open but more importantly his 21st grand slam title nudging him ahead of great rivals, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. Is he now the GOAT? Well the debate has raged on this week with some saying that it will only be when these three have put their racquets down that the answer will be clear. Maybe though for my money, Rafa has it by a nose.

Elsewhere though, a sporting icon has hung up his boots and his gridiron as well. Legendary American footballer Tom Brady, quarterback for twenty years with the New England Patriots and latterly Tampa Bay Buccaneers has retired at the age of 44 (!!) winning no less than seven superbowl titles in an illustrious career. He has won more titles than any other team never mind player. To ask what his greatest achievement is, is like being presented with a tray of the world's most valuable diamonds and being told to rate them from worst to best. But to understand the greatness of Tom Brady, you have to go back to his very early days playing the game. Brady was not that good, in fact he was decidedly average. In the 2000 draft where the best players are numbered 1-20, Tom Brady was eventually acquired by the Patriots as something of an afterthought to be their reserve quarterback.... at pick number 199.

Yet it was this adversity that formed Brady into the player he would become. The expectation in general was that this average sized, average speed guy would have well, an average career, a journeyman at best. Brady changed the narrative. He knew that he was average build and average speed so he honed in on accuracy and efficiency and with almost monotonous perfection (ala Glen McGrath targeting an English batsman's off stump) Brady first rose up the ranks before towering as a colossus as the undisputed GOAT of American Football. To say that he was perfect however would be to view the man through rose tinted specs. He was tarnished by his part in what became known as Deflategate, whereby he and others were cited for taking air pressure out of the ball in matches where it was wet in order to get a better grip and therefore an advantage. Not in the spirit of the game and very much against the rules. Brady was banned for a period but came back stronger.

There's a man in the bible called David, the shepherd boy who became king. I'm not

going down the route of GOAT as far as he's concerned but there are parallels. From the prophet Samuel's perspective, his 'number 1 draft' to be God's appointed king was Eliab and when God said 'no' then his number 2 pick was Abinadab. Again God said 'no' and the cycle repeated until there was only one pick left. That pick was David. 'Really?' thought Samuel. 'Definitively yes' said God. But even with God's seal of approval, the average views remained. His brothers told him to push off when he visited them near the frontline as they faced off against the Philistines. But David's confidence in God and in his unerring accuracy honed in the sheep fields meant that he was steadfast in his belief that God had plans which David was part of. Stood before a quizzical King Saul with armour three sizes too big for him, David tossed the metal to one side and with sling and stones undertook to take on the giant of Goliath. It only took one shot to hit the target. Efficiency and Accuracy. From that point, David's star was on the rise. His life was full of many good things and the psalms are perhaps his greatest legacy but David, like Tom Brady, like all of us, got it wrong, in one instance badly wrong and it was a while before recovery came. In Psalm 51, David calls out to God to 'restore the joy of his salvation' and in God's grace that's what happened.

There is a small verse in Acts 13 which is often skimmed over but I feel is significant. It reads: 'Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep'. For me this verse is a huge encouragement. 99.99% of us will never be Brady's or David's but God has a call on our lives and, the story for each of us will be that mixture of success and failure but we can all serve God's purpose - whether that be big or small in our eyes - in our generation. In 1 Peter 1 we read: you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

The debate about the Greatest Of All Time in whatever sphere of life is interesting but when we lift our eyes to see the Greatest of Eternity, the One who loves us, then perspective says there's a part that we can play for the kingdom of God that transcends the kingdom of this world's values. This week, may you know that you are drafted by God to serve His purposes in your generation and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfil that calling.