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After Giants' Surreal Touchdown, Debates on the Strategy

By **SAM BORDEN**

INDIANAPOLIS — On a night that featured a variety of surprising moments — including a safety, several critical dropped passes and Tom Coughlin, the 65-year-old Giants coach, embracing the rapper Flavor Flav in celebration — the most bizarre moment surely was [Super Bowl XLVI's final touchdown.](#)

The setup seemed standard enough. The Giants were trailing by 2 points, there was a little more than a minute remaining, and the Giants had the ball on the [New England Patriots' 6.](#) Quarterback [Eli Manning](#) took the snap and handed the ball off to running back Ahmad Bradshaw, and as Bradshaw began his surge, the game suddenly turned on its head.

It was like opposite day. The Patriots defenders, trained their whole lives to try to push and claw and fight to bring down the ball carrier, stood up and opened a double-wide hole for Bradshaw to reach the end zone.

Bradshaw, trained his whole life to sprint into the end zone whenever he could, pulled up just short of the goal line and tried to fall down.

Even the players and coaches on the Giants' sideline, who had spent their whole lives cheering when their team scored, did not know what to do when Bradshaw failed to slam on his brakes in time and fell, almost dejectedly, into the end zone for a touchdown.

The scene was surreal; the Giants had just taken a [21-17 lead in the Super Bowl](#), and no one was celebrating. Bradshaw did not even know whether to spike the ball.

"It was a little strange," offensive lineman Kevin Boothe said.

"It was definitely weird," running back Brandon Jacobs said.

"It wasn't exactly what we were looking for," tight end Bear Pascoe said. "But it worked out great."

The reason for the incongruous sequence was simple: the Giants were concerned about leaving the Patriots, who had quarterback Tom Brady and one timeout, too much time to score a decisive touchdown. That is why Manning screamed, "Don't score! Don't score!" as soon as he saw the Patriots' defenders standing up instead of rushing.

His hope, he said Monday, was that Bradshaw would stop at the 1 and wait until he was tackled, allowing more time to run off the clock and forcing the Patriots to use their final timeout.

Still, Manning acknowledged how difficult it must be for a player, on perhaps the biggest play of his career, no less, to suddenly do the exact opposite of what he has always done.

"I know it's tough for a running back," Manning said. "They see a big hole right there going for a touchdown. I

think something almost had to pop into his head like: "Something was up. This is a little too good to be true."

In his postgame news conference, New England Coach [Bill Belichick](#) said that his rationale for letting the Giants score was based on how short a potential winning field goal attempt would have been. With the ball inside the 10, Belichick said, it is "a 90 percent field-goal conversion" rate for N.F.L. teams.

Not all of the Patriots players seemed to agree with the call, however. Boothe said that after the play was over, he asked New England defensive tackle Vince Wilfork if the Patriots had purposely laid back, and Wilfork nodded ruefully. Linebacker Brandon Spikes told reporters after the game that it "killed" him to let the Giants score, saying, "When the call came in to let them score, I kind of was like, 'What?'"

Spikes added, "It definitely was tough."

A day later, the Giants' views on the play, and on the concept over all, seemed to vary. Coughlin said he did not instruct Bradshaw to stop short before the play, preferring to take the guaranteed points and not play for a last-second winning field goal when something could go wrong, like a bad snap or a shanked kick.

The running backs coach Jerald Ingram said Bradshaw did the right thing, though he had hoped he would linger on the 1 as long as possible and fall into the end zone only when the Patriots went to tackle him.

"We rehearse a lot of situations, and he understood the clock," Ingram said. "He just had too much momentum."

One significant factor that made taking the touchdown more attractive was the fact that it gave the Giants a 4-point lead, meaning the Patriots would need to score a

touchdown — as opposed to just kicking a field goal — to win.

That was why Jacobs said he was not concerned. The Giants scored with 57 seconds remaining, and Jacobs said that while quarterbacks like Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers or New Orleans's Drew Brees had the firepower to go the length of the field that quickly, he did not think Brady and the Patriots could do it.

They would need a lot more than 57 seconds to win the game, Jacobs said, "so I wasn't worried about it."

The play was just the latest example of [an age-old debate](#) among football players, coaches and fans over what strategy is best in those endgame situations. In Super Bowl XXXII, the Packers [allowed the Denver Broncos to score](#) with less than two minutes remaining, hoping it would give them time to rally. As with the Patriots on Sunday, however, their plan did not work.

The former Giants linebacker Harry Carson said Monday that he recalled discussing situations just like that one with his teammates during the 1980s. Carson said that the consensus among players then was that the strategy was a poor one and that he and his teammates found it distasteful.

"On some level, I understand it," he said. "But it just seems wrong. It goes against everything that we are taught to do as a player."

