

Farewell to a Legend

By: Austin Ragland

March 24, 2019



As many have been expecting for some time now, Patriots Tight End Rob Gronkowski officially announced his retirement from the NFL via Instagram this early this afternoon. In his nine years in the league, he had 7861 receiving yards and a staggering 80 touchdowns. In addition, he was able to win 3 championship rings, was a 4-time 1st team All-Pro, and went to 5 Pro Bowls. With a stacked résumé any way you chalk it up, Gronk will be a sure fire first ballot hall of famer, and arguably the best tight end in NFL history.

Being held to a limited role due to injuries in the 2018 season, the possibility of Rob Gronkowski retiring was definitely on the radar of the sports world. Though he downplayed the discussion following the conclusion of the playoffs, riding off into the sunset with a story book ending as a Super Bowl Champion only seemed fitting to cap off such a career. In his last game of his illustrious career, Gronkowski logged one more impact performance when it mattered most, with 6 catches for 87 yards. This included an 18 yard catch and a huge 29 yard catch setting up Patriots deep in the red zone, where they scored the only touchdown drive of the game.

As a 6-6, 265 pound freak of nature, Gronkowski used his massive frame to carry defenders for yards after the catch, stiff arm safeties, and throw a supercharged spike after finding the end zone. Throughout his outstanding NFL career, Gronk also always seemed to shine the brightest in the biggest moments of games. This of course was aided by the presence of the winningest and most poised clutch time quarterback of all time in Tom Brady. In just under a decade, the pair had no shortage of spectacular and memorable moments together.

Former Broncos Defensive Coordinator and current Los Angeles Rams DC Wade Phillips commented on the most impressive Gronk moment he got to witness first hand. In the 2016 AFC Championship Game, the Patriots found themselves down by 8 with a minute and a half to go and a long field ahead of them. On 4th and 10, he knew that Brady would try to get the ball in the hands of his best weapon who had been torching their talented defense all day long. Even against double coverage, Gronkowski was able to elevate above the defenders to bring down a deep seam route that put the Patriots deep into Broncos territory. Little did the Broncos know, his work was only beginning. Again, finding themselves at 4th down and only twelve seconds on the clock, Brady threw up a prayer to the back of the end zone while facing a blitz, and Gronk split multiple defenders to miraculously come up with the ball out of nowhere. From there, the Patriots would go on to complete the comeback at Mile High Stadium in overtime and win Super Bowl XLIX against the Legion of Boom Seahawks.

Another Gronk moment that stands out as a great representation of his career and style of play came back in 2013 on Monday Night Football against the Carolina Panthers. After making a reception at the 5-yard line on a quick slant route, Gronkowski drug a cluster of four Panthers defenders into the end zone for a touchdown. The combination of his size and the will to never give up on a play allowed him to make highlights like this on a weekly basis. In response, opposing teams resorted to double and even triple teaming him on a large chunk of plays, opening up the offense for other skill players to make plays for the team.

On the note of being a team player, the tight end really polished off his blocking abilities later in his career in order to complete his craft. Even when he wasn't lighting up the stat sheet with catches in his last season, it was virtually a guarantee that whoever Gronk was lined up against wasn't going to make a tackle in the Patriots run game that really came along in the second half of the season. By the end of the 2018 season, he was regarded around the league as one of the top 5 blocking tight ends in the NFL, despite serving as more of a pass catcher in years past.

Although I will admit I wasn't much of a fan early on, I can say that I will honestly miss being able to watch Rob Gronkowski suit up in pads next fall. His goofy and sometimes immature nature was sometimes criticized; however, it was all a part of his giant personality and energy he used to connect and motivate teammates. His style of play transformed the tight end position, and his talent displayed an unprecedented dominance that enhanced the dynasty the New England Patriots have been the last several years. As he hangs up his cleats for the last time, Gronk will have left the game as arguably the best to ever play the position, and certainly the most vibrant to do so.