

Risky Business – Super Bowl LV

No Quarter

Well, we didn't see this one coming. The Buccaneers and Tom Brady had a surprisingly easy go of it against the Chiefs in Tampa on Sunday. The Chiefs' GWC dipped below 5% early in the 2nd half and it only got worse from there. This was a greatly anticipated match up with what was expected to be a complex plot. As Aaron Schatz from Football Outsiders expertly dissected in his Super Bowl preview ([link here](#)), there were many key questions heading into Sunday. Looking at full seasonal DVOA performances, the Bucs stacked up well against the Chiefs and were actually a clear favorite in our simulation under that comprehensive assumption. But the major question was around how to weight more recent performances. The Chiefs appeared to be hitting their stride in the playoffs and looked like a team ready to take down consecutive championships. With heavier weighting to recent performances, the EdjSports model showed the Chiefs as a slight favorite at 53%. There were also concerns about the absence of left tackle Eric Fisher and the mobility of Patrick Mahomes. The relative merits of in-game decision making between Bruce Arians and Andy Reid had to be considered as well. Reid finished 6th in our EdjSports CCI rankings while Arians was ranked 30th. As we saw in last years' Super Bowl, 4th down decisions can have an enormous impact on an outcome if the difficult decisions present themselves. While all of these factors were potentially relevant, it turned out to be a bungled 2nd quarter by the Chiefs that will define this Super Bowl. They simply weren't present, at least mentally, for a crucial 15 minute stretch. The combination of penalty errors by the Chiefs and a merciless assault by the Bucs left little in doubt as the field was transformed for the Weednd show.

When examining penalties, it is important to consider context. Some penalties such as unnecessary roughness after the play is blown dead are essentially pure cost. Lining up offsides also offers little upside. Holding and pass-interference can be much more complicated as we may not know how the play would have unfolded without the penalty. Here is a breakdown of the Chiefs' costly penalties and poor execution during the 2nd Quarter. In each instance we will account for the GWC difference in the actual game state before and after the penalty.

Game State	Play Situation	Penalty	Cost to Chiefs
14:46 2 nd Quarter, Bucs trail 3-0	Bucs 2 nd and 10 from their own 30-yard line 3-yard pass completion	Unnecessary Roughness, 15 yards and first down.	-5.0% GWC
9:18 2 nd Quarter, Chiefs trail 7-3	Chiefs punt on 4 th and 8 from their own 17- yard line	Offensive holding. 8- yard penalty and subsequent 29-yard punt	-7.4% GWC
7:55 2 nd Quarter, Bucs lead 7-3	Bucs 3 rd and 4 at Chiefs 32-yard line. Short pass intercepted at 30-yard line.	Defensive holding. 5 yards and automatic first down.	-13.6% GWC
6:15 2 nd Quarter, Bucs lead 7-3	Bucs 4 th and 5 at the Chiefs' 22-yard line. Successful field goal	Defensive offside. 5- yard penalty and first down	-5.6% GWC
0:24 2 nd Quarter, Bucs lead 14-6	Bucs 1 st and 10 on their own 42-yard line. Pass incomplete	Defensive pass interference. 34-yard penalty and first down	-5.8% GWC
0:13 2 nd Quarter, Bucs lead 14-6	Bucs 1 st and 10 on Chiefs' 9-yard line. Pass incomplete	Defensive pass interference resulting in 1 st and goal at 1-yard line.	-2.7% GWC

While the aggregate penalty cost to the Chiefs is a staggering -40.1% GWC, it may not be a fair assessment of the true cost. As mentioned earlier it is difficult to tell how much some of the penalties altered the outcome of the play. At least 12.4% of the cost had virtually no upside, and perhaps we can discount the other 27.7% for unknowns. We can debate the true cost and the proficiency of the officiating crew, but it still appears the Chiefs squandered at least ¼ of a game in equity with mental errors in their most damaging quarter of the season.