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For Hoover's friends, a bittersweet Super Bowl

By Eric Neel
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I think if you told me I could pick any place to watch the Super Bowl on Sunday, I'd choose Scott "Hoover" Wilder's house in Westport, Conn.

His friends swear it's the only place to be when the Giants are on (or just about any other time, for that matter).

For more than 30 years now they've gathered at Hoover's. The house is tucked up against the third hole at the Longshore Golf Club in Westport, a course where Hoover used to caddy when he was young, and whenever his buddies from the neighborhood played a round, they'd sneak off the course for a bit and meet him on his patio to shoot the breeze and have a drink.

Every Thursday night, like clockwork, four friends who played a regular paddle tennis game stopped by on their way to the courts, and Hoover's mom Nancy would put out a little spread. Friends who had moved away made the pilgrimage, too. His friend Don came to watch the Super Bowl every year since 1983. It's what you did. You came to Hoover's. You brought your new best girl to meet Hoover, and later you brought your kids to play with Hoover's model cars. "We were all drawn to him," his friend Rick says. "He was one of those people everyone wanted to be around."

Hoover had been in a wheelchair since he was 19; he'd fallen asleep at the wheel driving home from his first semester of college and wrecked his car. As a quadriplegic he couldn't do many of the things he'd always loved to do: there was no more pickup ball and no more golf; his dancing and motor-biking days were over. He needed his friends, to stave off the pain, to feel connected to life outside his room and beyond his chair. And as they rallied to him, coming by to talk, to help him with a meal or a glass of water, to take a walk with him or listen to some new blues tune he liked, as they came in and out of his orbit, day by day, game by game, party by party, his friends came to realize how much they needed Hoover, too.



scotthooverwilder.com

Hoover at his 50th birthday celebration, flanked by two of his people.

Rick remembers the cards Hoover sent to his girls at Valentine's Day, and the CDs Hoover mixed of his favorite new songs and sent around to everybody. "Hoover's friends and family, all over the country, we were always there for him," Rick says. "But you have to understand how he lifted us up, too. He was the glue for us. He kept us connected to each other, no matter how far away we were or how long it had been since we'd seen each other. Whoever else we were, we were Hoover's people. He inspired us. He lived with such grace about what had happened, and he was always, even on his hardest days, just Hoover, full of life, quick to laugh, competitive as all hell. He loved life and we were so happy to be with him. I never once heard him complain."

He complained plenty about the Giants, though. And cheered for them, too. He was tuned in through thick and thin, always shouting at the TV screen, always scheming and dreaming some long-shot route to the Super Bowl. "It was as if his love of the team when he was young grew stronger after the accident, and grew stronger every year of his life," Rick says. "I always felt like he kept the rest of us young with his passion for the team, too. He made us all Giants fans."

As this year's Giants team was making its improbable run, Hoover got sick. His heart, tired after

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All things Super Bowl

years of working overtime, started to give out, couldn't consistently push the fluid off his lungs. He came down with pneumonia in early December and went into the hospital in critical condition in the days leading up to the NFC Championship Game. By the time the Giants took on the Packers in the bitter cold at Lambeau, he had a turn for the better, though, and somehow convinced the hospital staff to let him out of the ICU and into a room with a television.

Rick pictures him in that room like it was Hoover's room back home. "We were all right there with him, no matter where we were that day," he says. "When that third kick, 47 yards in negative-25-degree wind chill, went through the uprights like a frozen pot roast, I swear I could see Hoover, in my mind's eye, jumping out of bed and running out of the hospital with his fist pumping in the air. I was home in California and he was way out in Westport, but I could feel that like it was really happening."

A little more than 24 hours after watching kicker Lawrence Tynes send the underdog Giants to Super Bowl XLII, Hoover went into severe cardiac arrest. He never regained consciousness and died two days later at age 53.

Saturday afternoon his people will gather for a memorial service. And on Sunday they'll all be back at Hoover's place, living and dying with the Giants, soaking up the memories, maybe getting down on the floor with a couple of the model cars, and most definitely raising a glass to their host.

"I hope it's close, but no matter what happens it's going to be a special day for all of us," Rick says. "There's a really big void for us right now. We've lost our nexus, our center, but we're cheered too, because even after he's gone Hoover's bringing us together. Even after he's gone, we're all pulling for his Giants and sharing this time with him."



scotthooverwilder.com
Scott "Hoover" Wilder back in his high school basketball days.

If you believe in guardian angels, you know the Giants have a chance against the mighty Patriots.

If you have a heart half as big as Hoover's, you'll be rooting for them all the way.

And if you have friends who mean the world to you, near or far, and teams you've grown up with, win or lose, you'll be like me come Sunday; you'll wish you were in Westport, with Hoover's people.

Eric Neel is a columnist for Page 2. You can reach him [here](#).

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