

A REAL HERO: IN MEMORY OF SCOTT WILDER

Tomorrow night, millions of Americans will gather around television sets to watch the most anticipated game of the football season. It's so big, it's called the Super Bowl. There's a lot of hype every year about the game, but this year, there is more than usual. The undefeated New England Patriots are putting their record setting 18-0 record on the line, hoping to become just the second undefeated team in the history of the NFL, and the New York Giants, after a miserable start to the season, have rallied to become a genuine threat. After the game, they'll name an MVP—maybe it will be Eli Manning, or Tom Brady. Maybe Randy Moss. But whoever it is, sportscasters and fans will probably call him the hero of the game. And, in a limited sense, I guess the word hero is appropriate. But we are here today to honor the memory of a real hero, Scott Wilder.

Scott's accident so many years ago, robbed him of so very much, yet he refused to allow it to rob him of his spirit. He spent months and months in rehab after the accident, but as he recently told a friend, "I knew what I had to do . . . and I'm so grateful that no one else was hurt." Webster lists, as one of the definitions of a hero, "a man who shows great courage." And in dealing with his severe physical limitations Scott did just that. And he did it with great humor and charm.

Scott's love of sports was legendary. He was a fan of NASCAR, and loved clean and shiny cars. (Though the word Chevy was something of a swearword in his Ford loving family!)

He played golf in high school, and Captained the Golf Team in the Police and Fire Tournaments in recent times. He had a great eye, and would coach the players. He was especially good at reading a putt. And he was involved in numerous fantasy leagues.

Scott followed the Yankees and the Giants. Indeed, the night before his last surgery, he and Nancy had watched the Giants defeat the Packers to win the NFC title.

Nancy and Milo provided Scott with wonderful support and companionship over the years. Indeed, they truly enjoyed one another's company.

Scott's room was like his command center, with electronic gizmos and gadgets to make his life easier. If he wasn't into a game, or on the computer, he was listening to the Allman Brothers, or Eric Clapton. And his home was a gathering place for his friends. There they could find a safe harbor, a place of calm. An anchor. Scott's easy going and steady personality just made it a safe place to be. Not just for his family and friends, but for their children as well. Many a youngster got a special ride on Scott's wheelchair!

But Scott was never one to be confined by his disability. And so he could often be seen roaming the golf course at Long Shore. He was delighted to get his new van to further enhance his ability to move about the community.

The last time I saw I had a lengthy conversation with Scott was this past fall, at Lizzy Hobgood and Hunter Kass' wedding. We sat across from each other at the reception. Mostly we talked about baseball. I'm a Red Sox fan, but Scott never held that against me. While team loyalty was important to him, what mattered more was the love of the game itself. And I think that could be said about Scott in general. Yes, he loved the Yankees, and the Giants. Yes, he had his personal tastes in music. Yes he enjoyed fancy cars. But in the end what mattered most to Scott was life itself, and all the people that filled it. Scott was so comfortable in his own skin, that he made others feel comfortable in theirs. And maybe that is what made him a hero.

Tomorrow night, at 6:30, folks will be watching the Super Bowl. No doubt, many of you here will be among the millions of fans who do so. It was something Scott loved to do each year. And there will be all manner of accolades for the winning team, not to mention a free trip to Disney World! But as much as I love a good game, I for one subscribe to the old proverb: "It's not whether you win or lose that counts, but how you play the game." The real heroes are those who move through life with love and respect for others. The real heroes are those who try to make the world a better place for those around them. I don't know if Scott won or lost by the standards of the world. But I do know this. He played the game of life with courage, with gusto, and with love. He was indeed a real hero.

When we stand before God at the end of our lives, I don't imagine the Holy One is impressed by those things held in high esteem by the world. I don't think God is impressed by Super Bowl rings, or degrees, or the balance in our bank account. I don't think God cares much about what kind of car we drove, or how many square feet we had in our house. But I do think God is very concerned with how we lived our lives. I do think God cares about how we loved others, and how they loved us. In the end, it is love that truly counts. And you are all here, because Scott loved and was loved in return. That, in the end, is the only score that truly counts.

Amen
John H. Danner