

Super Bowl road rage---and regret

Little Brother Kenny and I had 1982 game in Pontiac in our sights, but we let it slip away.

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By Arnie Goldman

Everyone's excited about the Super Bowl coming to Detroit. Jerome Bettis is thrilled to play in front of his home town. Stevie Wonder is preparing for his pregame show, the Stones are practicing for halftime, and office pools are picking points on the Seahawks and Steelers.

Me? I just try to avoid TV commercials and news shows preparing us to watch. I don't have the heart for it. I live in my own time tunnel traveling back to the days of Super Bowl XVI in Detroit.

I had turned 25 on January 3, 1982. I was working for my dad's company, Hardware Sales and Supply, and had money in my pocket most of the time. I worked in purchasing and advertising, sometimes receiving perks like the two Super Bowl tickets given by Master Lock, a sponsor of the Super Bowl. Their sales representative presented the tickets to dad and me in early December.

My father decided to give his ticket to my little bother Kenny. He turned thirteen on Dec. 23rd and this was going to be one of his birthday presents. Kenny was a big sports fan. He knew every Lions player and most others in the NFL.

When January 24th arrived, what everyone feared occurred. The snow fell steadily and the streets were slick. The wind-chill factor was minus 30. I'd told Kenny to be ready early and picked him up at my parents' house three hours before the 4p.m. kickoff.

The streets weren't slippery near home. I drove on Middle Belt to Square Lake Road. Traffic was moving pretty well until Opdyke, about three miles from the Silverdome, which we could see from the car. It looked like a circular silver Oz and we were on the gray brick road of Opdyke with plenty of time.

We listened to some of Kenny's favorite songs on my 8-track stereo in my blue Fiat Strada. There must have been an accident ahead. We listened to Supertramp and REO Speedwagon as we moved one and two car lengths per minute. The brake was on most of the time.

We had an hour to go and I was getting nervous. We turned on the Super Bowl pregame show on AM radio and waited.

We'd stopped moving, my blood pressure was rising and kickoff time was approaching. I pounded my fists on the steering wheel, furious at the Silverdome crew and planners in charge. Weren't they prepared for bad weather? Didn't they have other roads and parking lots?

Kenny sat quietly, a 13-year-old boy dreaming of the big, green Super Bowl Silverdome field just a few feet ahead and football players in colorful uniforms right in front of him. He'd only been to a few football games in his lifetime, never a playoff game. He couldn't wait to get there. I couldn't wait to get out of the car and into a restroom.

I opened the car window and heard a man asking for tickets. He would pay \$100 per ticket.

I told Kenny we'd probably miss the first quarter anyway, and asked him what should we do. He gave me a half-hearted smile, and said \$100 could buy a lot of football cards and he needed a new baseball mitt anyway. I took the money, gave Kenny a \$100 bill, stuffed mine into my pocket, passed the stadium, and turned 180 degrees back down Opdyke.

On the way home, we listened to the first half on radio. I told Kenny we were lucky to leave since it was a blowout, San Francisco leading 20-0. We reached our parents' house by halftime, in time to see Up With People presenting a "Salute to the 1960's and Motown."

Kenny and I watched some of the third quarter. After San Francisco held Cincinnati to two yards on four plays during the "greatest goal line stand in Super Bowl history," we stopped watching.

Kenny went to his room and I went down to the basement. When I came upstairs, I went to Kenny's room and saw the Cincinnati Bengals score a touchdown to make it 26-21 with 20 seconds left. Kenny stared at the crisp one hundred dollar bill.

Cincinnati tried an onside kick, which San Francisco recovered. The game was over.

The next year, I was invited to a Super Bowl XVII party, but I could hardly watch. I drank a few beers, ate some appetizers, and laughed. When I stared at the TV, my eyes started to water, so I went into another room and ate some more.

Only a few months before, Kenny had seen his last Detroit Tigers baseball game before being hit in my dad's Chevy Citation just a few hundred feet from their house. I was called to come to Botsford Hospital. That night, I had to nudge my dad, his head swollen with bruises from the crash, and whisper to him that Kenny was gone.

Next Sunday, when Super Bowl XL game is played, and tickets now being sold on eBay for \$2000 and more are scalped outside Ford Field, I plan to sit with my daughter, Marlee, in her bedroom, five days before her 11th birthday, playing any game she wants: Uno, Twister, or Skip-Bo.

It doesn't matter. I will have no rage. I will not be her father that day. I just want to be her friend, her friend forever.

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