

The Game of the Century

A lot of people don't know that God got involved in Super Bowl XLII. Here is the amazing story of that contest, in the words of New York Giants wide receiver David Tyree.

The scoreboard told the story: the New England Patriots 14, the New York Giants 10. Just 1 minute and 15 seconds of game time blazed from the clock of that big board at the University of Phoenix Stadium.

Super Bowl XLII in Glendale, Ariz., last February was coming to an exciting close, and more than 72,000 people were on their feet. Screaming Patriots fans already were celebrating a victory. They were sure the "Pats" were going to cap off an undefeated season by clinching this final, coveted NFL game.

But the Giants' fans weren't giving up.

"Eli! Eli! Eli!" they chanted, as New York quarterback Eli Manning lined up to take the ball from center. Eli took the snap, faded back to throw and somehow escaped a sure tackle by three defenders who were grabbing at his jersey. He got the ball away, lobbing it on a long, 32-yard pass.

At the other end I was waiting—an obscure special-teams player for the Giants. I jumped, reached high and caught the ball. I wasn't able to pull it against my body, so I mashed it hard against my helmet and held on. Pass complete!

Seconds later, wide receiver Plaxico Burress took another pass from Eli for a touchdown, and the Giants won the game. The new score, 17-14, flashed on the scoreboard.

My awkward, unusual catch has been dubbed many things, from "The Catch" to "The Circus Catch" to what I call it, "The Miracle of the Supernatural Bowl." It has become Super Bowl history. But it was more than just a catch. It was a catch

with a story behind it. And the catch to the story is, I knew before Super Bowl XLII began that God had planned something big for me on the field that would glorify Him.

'The Big Play' Is Coming

The night before the game I had called my spiritual mom, Kim Daniels, and her husband, Ardell, of Spoken Word Ministries in Jacksonville, Fla., and asked them to pray with me, as we had done many times before. Kim turned the prayer focus toward my performance at the game.

She told me the Lord was showing her a vision. She said I had "spiritual glue" on my hands and that she was confident God would give me "the big play." She also said that in her vision my feet looked like an animal's feet (in the Spirit). She spoke out very loudly, as if she was surprised: "David, you have hinds' feet! God is about to quicken you to run!"

Ardell, or "Danny," as people call him, told me the Lord showed him that He was bringing me out of the obscurity of being a special-teams player. He said I would be known as a great wide receiver and that the world would know my name.

Their words were great confirmations of what had been said to me before. My accountant, Hubie Synn, had called me one day not long before the game and told me that God was about to highlight my skills as a wide receiver. He said God was bringing me out of obscurity and that my name was going before me. He also said God knew my desire to share my faith and that He was giving me a platform to do so. My pastor, Bishop Charles Harris, who has prayed for my family and career for years, also confirmed God's plan for great things that were about to come.

All these words gave me confidence and reassurance. The Bible says to let things be confirmed by two or three witnesses. God used more than two or three to confirm what was about to happen at Super Bowl XLII. I heard their words and believed

them—but I never could have imagined what God was about to do.

Feb. 3, 2008: Game On!

I awoke the morning of the big game with nervousness in my stomach but a big smile in my heart. Win or no win, even the experience of playing in the Super Bowl was a memorable and honorable moment.

Game day seemed like the longest day of my life. The hands on the clock could not move fast enough. I kept looking around, saying, “What time is it?” I could feel the electricity in the air.

Finally we boarded the bus for the stadium. It was time. Everything I had played, prayed and practiced for was stirring inside me and reaching out for victory.

After all the years of wondering what it would be like to play in the Super Bowl, my opportunity to know had finally come. I could experience this moment with 52 great guys and an awesome coaching and management staff.

Even head coach Tom Coughlin had a look in his eyes that allowed no room for defeat. After he’d given us a visual picture of what it’s like to win a championship, he proclaimed, “This game is ours!” Everything in me agreed.

The most exciting part of any football game, for me, is the introduction of the teams. It seemed as if everything stood still and focused on us as we ran through the tunnel onto the field.

After local Glendale resident and American Idol winner Jordin Sparks sang the national anthem, the game coin was flipped, and it was on! I was standing in the middle of my promise from God. The prayers, prophecies and words of encouragement were rooted in my spirit just as the plays of the game were in my mind.

At the moment of the first kickoff, the thousands of flickering lights from the flashing of cameras nearly blinded me. I could see fans sitting on the edge of their seats. From what I could tell, they didn't move from that position the entire time.

The game's first half was low scoring. As celebrity Ryan Seacrest announced the halftime show, which featured Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, we headed into the locker room. The score was of 7-3, Patriots leading.

Being behind did not lower our spirits. We leaned on the fact that we had come so close to beating the Patriots in an earlier game during the regular season. I walked into the locker room amid a focused and collected team and yelled, "We got this, fellas!"

It was a long halftime, and the mood in the locker room was mostly a focused one. Defensive end Michael Strahan started pumping up the team. The guys in our locker room were on fire. There wasn't an ounce of doubt left in the room.

I was ready to play in the second half because I knew the play I had been waiting on for five weeks could be called. I had a horrible practice on the Friday before the game and dropped almost every ball. I went over to Eli to let him know that I was ready.

I told myself, "Friday was Friday, but this is Super Bowl Sunday," and I wanted to say the same thing to him. Before I was able to finish my statement Eli cut me off, looked into my eyes and said: "I know you're ready. I trust you."

The Catch Seen 'Round the World

The second half was under way. The play had come—the big moment I had been waiting on. The ball was snapped, and I ran to the end zone.

Eli threw to me. The play was picture-perfect. The ball came to me as if I were a magnet and it were a piece of steel.

As it dropped into my hands time seemed to stand still for a minute. When my mind caught up with the moment, I heard the announcer saying: "Touchdown! David Tyree, number 85!"

It was unbelievable! I had made the first touchdown of the game for our team. This was too much for me to take at one time. The feeling was overwhelming. With no touchdowns under my belt all year, the Lord used me to put my team in the lead with a score of 10-7.

It was the greatest moment of my football career. I had made the touchdown; I had made the big play that my spiritual mother spoke about.

Or so I thought.

We all knew, though, that it was not time to have a victory party. Not yet. Our feelings were confirmed when the Patriots scored another touchdown with approximately two minutes left in the game. We needed a supernatural drive.

Patriots fans began to celebrate what they thought was a sure victory as we started our drive down the field. I could tell from the way things were going with our offensive possession that we were not driving on our own power. It was really supernatural, and it even seemed as if angels were on the football field working on our behalf.

Interceptions that should have taken place against us did not happen, and plays that did not make sense kept happening in our favor. Everyone from the superstars to the rookies made outstanding plays. But the craziest play of all was still coming.

With only a few minutes left to drive to the goal line, Eli had dropped back to throw a pass but was being bombarded by

defensive linemen. Three of them clearly should have sacked him, but he somehow shook off every attempt. It was as if he had oil on his jersey—he kept slipping right through the hands of those New England defensive players.

Off balance and without time to think, and with 1 minute and 15 seconds left on the clock, he flung the ball—a 32-yard pass that was heading in my direction.

I was being defended by one of the best and most aggressive safeties ever to play the game, Rodney Harrison. If I missed this ball, our team probably would not have time to recover. The game would be over.

Everyone was depending on me, and I could not let them down. All I could think as I watched that ball sailing my way was, By any means necessary!

Rodney and I struggled to get to the ball as I tried to catch it at its highest point. Only a few seconds had clicked by, but the play seemed to be running in slow motion as I reached high and behind my head to get the catch.

Touching the ball with my fingers and pinning it down to my helmet, I was determined to hold on. I could not let it go!

With Rodney on me like a Siamese twin, I hit the ground with my back arched in an awkward position. I was tied in a knot with my defender, but I still had the ball. It was a miracle that I was not hurt, considering the way I landed.

But then I saw the most important thing—the referee was signaling the catch was good. The crowd was going nuts!

I did not realize the seriousness of this catch at the time. The only thing that mattered was that my team was in a position to score. And we were—we had gained a first down at New England's 24-yard line.

But we had no timeouts left and only 57 seconds left to score,

and the clock was running. I was thinking: Come on, Eli, you've kept it together all this time. We need one more play.

Four plays later, the clock had ticked down to 39 seconds. Now there was no time for a mistake. Win or lose, this was it.

It was as if Eli heard me and moved forward with the plan. He called for another pass play. This time he threw in the direction of wide receiver Plaxico Burress, who was going for the end zone.

Eli's pass and Plaxico's catch could not have been better-executed. The ball floated in the air over Plaxico's head and dropped right into his hands.

Touchdown!

I lost control. I fell to my knees and began to worship and thank God. My teammates were running on the field yelling: "We did it! We did it!" The extra-point kick was good. Time ran out.

Giants 17, Patriots 14. Game over!

I could not help but hold my head down to my chest and say, "God, You did it!" I looked into the television camera and gave a shout-out to my mother in heaven. Then it was time to celebrate the miracle.

I knew that what had happened was due to God's intervention. I took great joy in exclaiming not "We did it!" but "God did it!" An average of 97.5 million people in the U.S. and 148.3 million total viewers had watched some part of the game. It was the second most-watched TV program of all time in the U.S., according to the Los Angeles Daily News.

'One of the greatest plays'

As stunned Patriots fans huddled in a daze, hordes of Giants fans charged down from the stands to take over the field. On

the sidelines, we drenched Coach Coughlin with a cooler of ice and Gatorade. My family members too ran onto the field as we moved toward midfield for the presentation of the trophy. Eli was named the Most Valuable Player.

Within minutes of the final buzzer, reporters had dubbed the way I caught the ball against my helmet as “The Catch” and pronounced it to be the best play in Super Bowl history. These were honorable acknowledgements, but every player on the team felt like MVPs that night.

The next day the New York Times said “The Catch” was “among the greatest plays in Super Bowl history.” Soon after that USA Today agreed. Ben Walker of the Associated Press called it the “Circus Catch.”

Even Eli’s brother, Peyton—MVP of Super Bowl XLI—said: “Eli’s pass to Tyree ... was one of the greatest plays of all time.” Steve Sabol, president of NFL Films, said the catch had everything—drama, mystique, even romance.

What did I think when I saw that scoreboard lit up with the Giants’ winning score? At first I was in awe of what God had done and the way He had come through. I cried for a moment. I went through a bagful of emotions, but I had to go through them in about 30 seconds. That’s all the time I had before the postgame media circus began.

When I finished all the interviews, I headed for our hotel. By that time, the first floor was one big party. Family and friends attended, and several of us celebrated the Lord. I finally had a minute to talk with Eli. I thanked him for giving me the chance to make the plays. I’ll never forget the way he slung that ball to me.

What a Platform!

NFL statistics show that Super Bowl XLII was the most-watched Super Bowl game in the history of the sport. Few can deny that

it was more than a Super Bowl—it was a Supernatural Bowl!

I received a double blessing from it—not only did I get to participate in it, but also now I get to tell everyone about it. I've gone from the Giants player no one recognized to a guy who can't have a quiet dinner at a restaurant anymore.

The biggest thing is the public platform God has given me for being a positive role model. As I told Derrin Horton in an ESPN interview after the game, we players are role models. We have to step up. It's not what we've asked for—it's what we've been given.

Jesus promises that the last will be first (see Matt. 19:30; Luke 13:30). That promise came alive in my heart. He took me as a football player from obscurity to being an example of His faithfulness and favor.

One thing I am confident about is that I will never question God's will. The comfort I have lies in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (NKJV).

I believe that God really knows what is best for me, and in my worst moments He is still Lord. He has worked everything out for my good, and He will continue to. He will do the same for you.

David Tyree was drafted by the New York Giants in 2003 after playing college football at Syracuse. He is the author of a new book, *More Than Just the Catch* (Charisma House), from which this is adapted. He and his wife, Leilah, have four children and live in New Jersey.