

Nevada cancer patients already Super Bowl winners

By AP

RENO – From the point of view of two Nevada cancer patients, there will be no losers at Sunday's Super Bowl.

One will be at the game with his family, and the other one made it all possible with a little help from the NFL and a Lake Tahoe research center founded by the family of the late Oakland Raiders great Gene Upshaw.

Gary Kasden of Incline Village had just completed an exhaustive series of chemotherapy treatments at the Gene Upshaw Memorial Tahoe Forest Cancer Center in December when he learned he'd won a Super Bowl trip as part of a fundraising raffle for the center.

But Kasden got the flu, then came down with double pneumonia, scuttling his trip. He reached out to the Northern Nevada Children's Cancer Foundation, which found a deserving replacement in 16-year-old Kody Beach of Spring Creek in Elko County.

Beach, who was diagnosed with cancer last summer, found out at a surprise luncheon with his family at a Reno restaurant on Thursday. He took off for New York City on a flight Friday with his older brother, Cory, and parents, Kirt and Carmen.

"I never thought something like this would happen to me," Kody told the *Reno Gazette-Journal*.

Over the past five months, the teen has had five surgeries and undergone months of treatment as the disease metastasized into his lungs and reached stage IV cancer, the most advanced stage. But he continues to receive regular chemotherapy

treatments and his parents remain optimistic about his prospects for recovery.

“This is great. I think it will rejuvenate him,” Kirt Beach said. “He’s been strong through the whole process, stronger than us, but at some point depression starts to set in because you can’t go to school and you go through all these treatments and every week you have to go to the doctor. This is unbelievable.”

Kody’s unexpected football fairytale began when Kasden and his wife, Megan, won a pair of tickets with the all-expense paid trip in the Gene Upshaw Memorial Fund Super Bowl Raffle

Upshaw, who went on to lead the NFL players’ union, was a regular at the annual American Century Championship celebrity golf tournament at Stateline before his death from cancer in 2008.

After Kasden’s doctor ruled out the trip, his wife said they started a search for someone who believed, “Going to the Super Bowl is my dream.”

The Tahoe Forest Health System Foundation helped enlist the Northern Nevada Children’s Cancer Foundation to track down Kody. A football fan since his youth, his father said he would “watch ESPN 24/7 if you allowed him.”

The news only got better when the NFL mistakenly mailed four tickets instead of two, then told the family to keep them.

Megan Kasden said it was meant to be.

“I honestly don’t believe in coincidences,” she said. “I believe in angels.”

Upshaw’s widow, Terri, said she was thrilled.

“Gene did it. Gene is looking down,” she said. “That’s just the kind of guy he was. He would have loved this story.”