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AUSTIN MEEK

## ‘Dom Diddy’ honors one classic QB

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**F**rom the time he was a kid keeping stats for his father in the 49ers radio booth, Dan Fouts has lived the game of football: watching the game, playing the game, describing the game to an audience.

When tragedy struck, it was natural that Fouts should turn to a football analogy. A play-book. A strategy. A team, huddled together to execute the plan.



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Except this time, for once, Dan Fouts wasn't the quarterback.

The quarterback was Dan's son, Nick, who was diagnosed with cancer in 2009. The team included all the people around him: the doctors and nurses, the caregivers, Nick's family and friends.

"He's the quarterback, and we are in the huddle with him," said Fouts, the Oregon alum, Pro Football Hall of Famer and CBS analyst. "He's calling the plays, and we're executing them.

"You want the patient to feel that we're fighting, that we're in this together, that you're not alone. That we can win."

That's why cancer is such a devastating, indiscriminate disease. Doing everything right doesn't guarantee a victory.

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Nick Fouts — his full name was Dominic Daniel — died in 2012 at the age of 34 after a battle with colon cancer. That was four years ago, but it could have been yesterday.

Those who know Dan as a bearded face on the TV screen every Sunday afternoon knew little about his loss. He's dealt with the tragedy mostly in private, but the memories are always there, never far from the surface.

"You can go there every day," Fouts said. "It doesn't take a trigger to bring him back, which is not easy. There's thousands of things."

**A**fter Nick died, the team came together again. Nick's sister, Suzanne Krueger, had just finished an MBA in finance and had the idea to start a foundation that would help other families with cancer-related expenses.

Since it launched three years ago, the Dominic Fouts Memorial Cancer Fund has donated \$77,000 to patient-support programs affiliated with Oregon hospitals.

The foundation has a board of directors but no employees; Krueger runs it herself with help from volunteers. The organization's annual fundraiser, the Dom Diddy Classic golf tournament, happens Monday at Tokatee Golf Club.

For Krueger, the foundation has been a way to help other families, and also to maintain a connection with her brother.

"I didn't feel like I could let a day go by that I didn't honor him and have him still in my life," she said.

Nick and Suzanne grew up together, separated by only 17 months. Even now, talking about him brings back a flood of memories.

"I cry every time I talk about it," she said.

Nick was born in 1978, just as Dan's career was taking off with the Chargers. He grew up surfing in San Diego, then got into snowboarding when the family moved to Sisters after Dan retired.

Nick had a keen sense of adventure, which he indulged often with his buddies in the Central Oregon wilderness.

"They would hike up mountains and snowboard down, which is insane," Dan said. "Just about all of the Cascades, too. He enjoyed the challenge. He had some fearlessness to him."

After traveling through Europe and Central America, Nick settled in Seattle and got a job as a sixth-grade science teacher. For an otherwise healthy guy in his early 30s, a high school quarterback, point guard and sprinter, the cancer diagnosis came as a shock.

**T**he Fouts team came together to help however they could. Dan's wife, Jeri — Nick's stepmom — kept a binder with every note, business card and Internet printout they'd collected. The family supported Nick's decision to explore alternative treatments, even if it meant looking outside the Northwest.

"Nick got one answer from a set of doctors up in Seattle that told him to start checking off his bucket list, but there were doctors all the way across the country that were doing things that he was researching — different surgeries, different ways to fight for your life," Krueger said.

Krueger wanted other families to have the freedom to pursue those options without worrying about travel expenses and medical bills not covered by insurance. Having been through the experience with Nick, she saw the burden that could exist for someone trying to navigate cancer alone.

"It's a long stressful, journey that somebody goes through," Krueger said. "It's all-consuming. You wake up one day and you're sick for some reason.

"It just never goes away. Even for survivors, it never goes away."

That's true for the families left behind, too. Dan returned to the broadcast booth not long after Nick's death — not because it helped him get over the loss, but because nothing really could.

"You've got to go on," Fouts said. "It was my job. You can say, 'That's what he would have wanted.' Well, I never bought into that sentiment. But knowing Nick, he would have expected me to go back."

**D**an had worked through Nick's illness, too. That was tough, knowing he couldn't be there for every moment, but the ones he had are cherished possessions.

There was one in particular, when Dan visited Nick's school in Seattle, the science teacher bringing his famous father to meet the kids for show-and-tell.

As they were walking to the car, a woman approached Dan and Nick in the parking lot. She ignored the Hall of Famer and went straight for Nick.

"Are you the sixth-grade science teacher?" she asked, as Dan edged into the shadows. "You

are my son’s favorite teacher.”

For once, Dan Fouts wasn’t the quarterback. It felt pretty good.

For more information on the Dominic Fouts Memorial Cancer Fund, visit [www.domfoutsfund.org](http://www.domfoutsfund.org).>

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**Dan Fouts**  
hall of fame quarterback, on returning to work after his son’s death

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Jun 26, 2016

Dan was a friend of mine in college--met him in 1974 when he was coming back from the Chargers to finish up his degree. One of the most real human beings I have ever known. As a dad who also lost as son, I understand the never ending sense of loss but the also the joy of recalling who he was and what he brought to our family. God bless you Dan and family and the work you are doing to help eradicate cancer.

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