

# In Pursuit

## Indianapolis Colts kicker Matt Stover's road to Super Bowl XLIV highlights God's faithfulness and provision.

By Susie Magill

"Age is nothing but a number."

This year's NFL postseason has proven just that. The league's oldest (Brett Favre, 40) and youngest (Mark Sanchez, 23) quarterbacks competed for the chance to stand toe-to-toe in Miami at Super Bowl XLIV. But even though both the Jets and Vikings lost their respective conference championships, we will still be watching history unfold on February 7, 2010.

Just a few days ago, Colts kicker Matt Stover celebrated his 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday in Indianapolis. Even without his family nearby, they still reside in Baltimore, Stover had plenty of reason to rejoice in the welcoming of this milestone. As the starting placekicker for the Colts, Stover will become the oldest player in NFL history to play in a Super Bowl.

"Everyone makes fun of me," said Stover with a chuckle in regards to playing in the NFL at his age. "But it really is such a privilege. It makes me feel like God has put me here for a reason. He's allowed me to play for 20 years now. To start out with a Super Bowl when I was 22, and now I am 42 in another one, that is just an awesome opportunity."

Stover's rookie season in 1990 with the New York Giants gave him his first Super Bowl experience, as the Giants defeated the Buffalo Bills, 20-19 in Super Bowl XXV. But being on injured reserve, Stover only watched from the sidelines. He didn't see playing time until the next season when he was traded to the Cleveland Browns. Winning the starting placekicker position for the Browns in 1991, Stover retained the role for the next 17 years, even following the Browns' move to Baltimore in 1996 to become the Ravens. In 2001, Stover led the Ravens to a 34-7 victory in Super Bowl XXXV. Ironically, the franchise's first title win was against Stover's previous team, the Giants.

Looking back, Stover is using these experiences to prepare for his third Super Bowl appearance, facing the New Orleans Saints.

"I just really enjoy the moment," Stover said of how he handles the busy week leading up to the Super Bowl. "I realize that as a player, it is a privilege to be there on a team that has gotten themselves this far. It is an amazing thing, but you don't want to get to the point where it is no fun. And how that happens is you obligate yourself too much. I set healthy boundaries and spend time with the people who matter most, which is my family and my wife and children."

But even Stover, a seasoned NFL veteran, is taken back by where he'll be standing come Super Bowl Sunday. Reality hit hard at the beginning of the 2009 season when Stover found himself without a team all together. Baltimore chose not to renew his contract during the offseason, leaving him as a free agent. For the first time in 19 years, Stover didn't kick in the NFL for the months of August and September. But that didn't shake his faith that God had something better planned.

"I just asked the Lord to lead me," said the Texas native. "I was never anxious about playing or not playing. He told me to stay in shape and I did. My wife and I were in agreement, and we just said, 'Lord, if you want me to play, put me out there.'"

A few weeks later, Stover received a phone call from the Colts, wanting him to tryout for a spot on the roster. Indianapolis needed a replacement for injured kicker, Adam Vinatieri, who was sidelined after undergoing arthroscopic knee surgery. Stover signed with the team the following day.



"I felt like it was an awesome opportunity," Stover said. "I knew the Colts had an opportunity to get to the Super Bowl. At that time they were 5-0. I really felt they were strong. And now, a few games later, here we are, in Super Bowl XLIV."

Stover clearly sees God in the middle of his transition from the Ravens. For the first time, he was able to spend the month of August at home, which was a blessing for his wife whose mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"I can write a book," explained Stover. "The way the timing of everything worked out in my life those months. It is just unbelievable how God orchestrated the whole process. His hand print is all over it."

And it is this unwavering faith in God that is helping Stover remain focused on his role for the upcoming game.

"I have to score points, that's what it really comes down to," he said. "My sole purpose on the team is to put points on the board, whether it is a field goal or extra point."

And with that purpose comes pressure. Stover knows the fate of his team winning a Super Bowl can hinge on the success of his field goal attempts. But it is that exact pressure that pushes him to submit himself to Christ and be dependent on His strength and power.

"I have to trust God. That's what it comes down to," Stover added. "That He has what is best for me, and He has given me an ability to glorify Him and to keep that focus on Him and not me. The fact that He is working through me frees me up so when it comes time to kick a field goal, I go out there and relax and focus on the job I need to do; go slow and hit the ball clean."

Come gametime, Stover's focus won't be on his recent birthday or the fact that he'll be the oldest player on the field. He will turn his attention to his Heavenly Father, Whom he desires to receive all the glory from every field goal kick, made or missed. And according to Stover, God will be following the game as well.

"I envision God in his Lazyboy with his popcorn and Coca-Cola, watching the game and having a blast," said Stover. "Some people say God doesn't care about the Super Bowl, but I say he does. He cares how we are playing, if it's for ourselves and own glory or for Him."

"I realize this is a platform and that God uses me. I have given Him my career, and He has blessed me so much. I appreciate that and adore Him for it. At the Super Bowl, my focus is on worshiping Him, giving Him glory, knowing He has something good for me no matter what."