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A super day for so many reasons Football intertwined with life-altering events

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By Gary Rotstein, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Most girls dream while growing up of their wedding day, the birth of a child and the other life-altering moments they'll forever cherish.

And then there are really special events, like watching the Steelers in a Super Bowl.

Barbara Vann and Mark Grohal, an engaged couple with no wedding date up until two weeks ago, just knew after watching the AFC championship game that the only appropriate time to marry would be Super Bowl Sunday. They'll tie the knot tomorrow afternoon, dressed in black and gold in a Steelers bar in Ocean City, Md., as part of a giant pregame tailgate party.

"I don't know if it's every girl's dream, but it's certainly mine," said Ms. Vann, 50, formerly of Tire Hill, Cambria County, who moved two years ago to Ocean City with her husband-to-be, who is from Windber in Somerset County. It will be the second marriage for each, but nothing like their first weddings.

Their ceremony at the 707 Sports Bar and Grill, performed by a wedding official in referee's garb, is just one of the special occasions that will be interwoven with the game in Pittsburghers' consciousness.

Many will find ways to ignore illnesses or other distractions. Hardcore fans can't see sacrificing their part in a long-awaited chance to celebrate a fifth Super Bowl win, any more than fan Terry O'Neill of Arlington could stand the thought of a possible playoff loss to the Indianapolis Colts when he had a fourth-quarter heart attack.

The Magee-Womens Hospital staff, for instance, figures on a late-day lull tomorrow as women try to suffer through labor pains and avoid game-time deliveries, said spokeswoman Michelle Baum. But just in case, televisions are available -- as always -- in the 20 or so birthing suites.

Carrie Welling of New Kensington figures her newborn daughter knew there was a Super Bowl she wanted to be part of tomorrow. That's why little Alexandria Joella (a middle name created by using the names of Steelers Joey Porter, Antwaan Randle El and Alan Faneca) Welling arrived hastily at Magee early Wednesday, her mother surmised, instead of waiting to be induced.

"She knew how important the game was and wanted to be [able to see it] too," said Ms. Welling, whose hospital room was filled with her own Steelers memorabilia. Her official due date for delivering her second child was today, but she had arranged with her doctor to induce labor three days ago, if necessary, to avoid risking any conflicts with the game.

Little Alexandria made sure that wasn't necessary, arriving just 20 minutes after her mother and her father, Anthony, entered the hospital at 4:15 a.m. Wednesday.

A pair of children who have been Children's Hospital patients are putting aside concerns about their conditions, as the UPMC Health Plan arranged an all-expenses-paid trip to Detroit, including game tickets, for Shawn Clemens Jr., 16, of Hempfield, and Katie M. Miller, 12, of Clarksburg, Indiana County.

Shawn has lupus and Katie has spina bifida. STAT MedEvac and Community EMS of Detroit have joined to provide medical personnel, a private jet and chauffeuring to and from the stadium in Detroit. Nurses and emergency medical technicians will handle any health needs that arise while the youngsters and their family members travel to the game.

"I'm pretty happy -- I would normally watch at a friend's house," Shawn said yesterday.

Ms. Vann and Mr. Grohal will be watching at their favorite bar, among other Western Pennsylvania expatriates, just like every Steeler Sunday. The only difference is this time they'll be married by the time of the game.

"It's a day I won't forget, I guarantee that," Ms. Vann said.