

## A Cowboys' Fan Lives on, Inside AT&T Stadium

By Paul W Krueger

When the Dallas Cowboys take the home field in September, Humberto Perez-Chavarria will be watching.

Humberto will have the best sideline seat, cheering for the team he loved his entire adult life. He'll be in the nosebleeds at AT&T Park, yelling encouragement to Dak Prescott, and he'll luxuriate in the owner's box, where he'll discuss draft prospects with Jerry Jones. Humberto will also be on the field, exhorting the defensive line to bust through and sack the opposing quarterback.

Humberto was born, raised, and lived his entire life in Mexico City. In a country where Mexican "futbol" reigns supreme, Humberto always favored American "football". Humberto inherited his passion for the pigskin from his father, and he played defense at the Colegio Tepeyac, his hometown high school.

"He wore number 55," recalls his wife, Nora. "He said lots of opposing players avoided him because he was so tall and strong," she said. "Beto," as Nora and his friends called him, was forever proud that he dislocated his shoulder and broke his jaw in pursuit of victory for Tepeyac Friars.

Beto's love of the game translated to a die-hard, life-long devotion to "America's Team." He proudly wore his Cowboys' jersey and never missed a game on TV in the living room of the couple's apartment in Mexico City's Polanco neighborhood. And no Cowboys' game was complete without Beto's favorite foods: pizza, potato chips, spicy peanuts, two beers, and quality tobacco for his pipe.



"He loved football so much, I honestly thought he had chosen the wrong profession," Nora said of Beto, who was a professional translator and interpreter for Mexico City-based banks and other businesses.

COVID didn't dim Beto's love of football, but like all of us, Nora and Beto witnessed the loss of friends and family who succumbed to the virus.

"When those we loved got very sick and sometimes died, we'd talk about what we wanted to happen to our bodies, if we too, were to die," Nora remembered.

Beto told Nora that if he died first, he wanted to be cremated. But it took him a while to decide where Nora should spread his ashes. "First he said, 'just flush me down the toilet,'" Nora recalled, smiling as she remembered Beto's irreverent humor. Turning serious, Beto said his favorite place would be a nearby park where they enjoyed walking. "No, on second thought," he told Nora, "spread them at the intersection of Arquimedes and Ejercito Streets."

But towards the end of the 2020-2021 season, while watching a Cowboys' game together in their apartment, Beto had another idea. "I want my ashes spread in the Cowboys' stadium," he told Nora. "Yes! That way I will not miss a single home game. I'll be right there, rooting them on!"

A few months later, Beto and Nora both got COVID. Nora recovered, but on February 7, 2021 — Super Bowl Sunday — Beto died of the virus.

Nora recalls how “nothing made much sense to me” in the grief that followed. But one thought remained crystal clear: “All I knew,” she recalls, “was that the time had come to fulfill love’s promises.”

She and three of the couple’s closest friends chose November 7, 2021 to fulfill Beto’s wish. They assumed it wouldn’t be hard to surreptitiously spread Beto’s ashes around AT&T stadium during a stadium tour. But spreading some directly on the field would be a challenge.

The group booked a VIP tour, hoping it might include the opportunity to walk on the Cowboys’ field. Nora booked her flight from Mexico City to Dallas. “Everyone was asking me, ‘Have you found a way to transport the ashes. How will you get them past security?,’” Nora recalls. A few days before her flight, Nora spied the answer in a bathroom closet: two small, sample-sized, plastic shampoo bottles. She filled them with Beto’s remains and wrote “Clay Mask” on the bottle tops, in case inspectors saw them.

“Beto always told me, ‘I am going to take you to a Cowboy’s game, so you’ll see how exciting it is,’” Nora recalled. “I just never thought he’d be taking me that way, with him inside my luggage.”



Nora recalls how, at the start of the stadium tour, the tour guides seemed to watch everyone very closely, “to be sure nobody did anything prohibited.” But Nora quickly and stealthily pulled the bottles from her purse. “When we walked in the sections where I knew Beto would have liked to sit and watch the game, I started leaving little bits of ashes,” Nora recalls. “A little here, a little there, so his presence would be all over the stadium. Even when the clean-up crews swept or vacuumed, I knew Beto’s essence would remain.”

The tour group then walked to the tunnel from which the Cowboys’ enter the field. “I couldn’t contain my emotions, and started to cry,” Nora recalls. She and her three friends were just steps away from the turf, where she wanted most to scatter Beto’s ashes. The tunnel doors opened, and the tour group walked towards the field. “I didn’t know if I should laugh or cry,” Nora remembers. “But I knew I had to pay attention and get away from the tour guides.”

Nora walked alone to the 40 yard line, opened one of the containers, and ran as hard and fast as she could towards the end zone. “My feelings got the best of me,” she recalls. “Tears blinded my sight. I couldn’t see anything. So I just opened my arms and started spreading the ashes.”

When Nora reached the end zone, she knelt down and talked to Beto. “Honey,” she told him. “We made it. We scored a touchdown. We did it. I love you always.”

She’s sure the tour guides and team security didn’t see her, or if they did, they had no idea what she was doing. But her three friends did witness Nora’s display of devotion. “They were in different parts of the stadium by then, so they watched the ashes coming down in waves, flying softly through the air, and landing on the turf where they will rest forever.”

Nora and her friends stayed in Dallas, and two days later watched the Broncos beat Beto’s beloved Cowboys. “I could hear him yelling, ‘You’re playing like little girls! You’re giving the ball to the Broncos! Why don’t you just play for them, Mother F\*\*\*kers!’”

But win or lose, Nora said what matters most is knowing that, “The Cowboys will always have their number one Mexican fan under their feet. Humberto will always cheer them on, because in his heart he will always be a die hard Cowboy’s fan.

“I know he will help them get up after every play, and every time the dust rises from the turf, that will be Humberto running with the Cowboys.”

