

Coughlin's pre-game speech: All you need is 'love'

BY Ralph Vacchiano

Taking a cue from Hickory High coach Norman Dale in the movie Hoosiers, Tom Coughlin didn't deliver a fiery pregame speech to his players on Saturday night.

Instead, his last presentation to the [Giants](#) before Super Bowl XLVI was a message straight from the heart.

He stood in front of his NFC championship team and told them: "I love every guy in this room."

That was one of the biggest themes of the five-to-six minute speech Coughlin delivered to his players at the end of the final team meeting before they took the field on Sunday night for the Super Bowl. He began his presentation at the team hotel with a five-minute highlight video, set to one of their favorite pre-game songs: Phil Collins' song "In the Air Tonight."

Then, according to details provided by Giants VP of communications Pat Hanlon, Coughlin hit on several themes, including "Finish," "Belief" and "Love."

Coughlin opened the presentation by talking about how proud he was of his team and the way they battled through a season that began with the Giants looking like they were facing a rebuilding year. Instead, they got off to a blazing [start](#) and a 6-2 record, before a four-game losing streak sent them towards rock bottom and they found themselves 7-7 and on the brink of elimination with just two games left to play.

The highlight video Coughlin showed his players focused on what happened next — five straight wins that got the Giants into the playoffs as the NFC East champions and all the way to the Super Bowl on Sunday night. It also included highlights of the Giants' 24-20 [win](#) over the New England Patriots in Foxborough, Mass., back on Nov. 6.

From there, Coughlin turned the speech back to the word that has become his theme of the season: "Finish." That's what he's been preaching to them since July 29, at the first team meeting, when he showed them a video of a high school cross-country runner from California named Holland Reynolds crawling across the finish line after she had collapsed near the end of the race. He showed them that same video last Saturday night, too, at their final meeting before they departed for Indianapolis.

Coughlin then moved on to "Belief," and he told his players how proud he was of what they had accomplished and how they had stuck together through good times and bad. He told them their belief in themselves and each other had inspired millions of people around the world.

From there, Coughlin moved on to talking about family. He told them that as the 15 players leftover from the Super Bowl XLII championship team know, when you first win a world championship you look for a teammate to hug. Then you look into the stands for your wife and your family, suddenly realizing "they are all world champions."

Then came the big, Hoosier-like finish, which several sources said may have been Coughlin's most emotional, inspirational moment of the season. He told them that championships are won by teams that love each other, which he knows his team does. And he told his players how much he loves them.

Then he finished by quoting one of his most inspirational sources: John Wooden the legendary UCLA basketball coach.

He referenced Wooden's infamous "Pyramid of Success," which originally had "Competitive Greatness" at the top of the pyramid. Coughlin told his players that later in his life, Wooden decided that "Love" belonged at the top.

Coughlin told his players that he agreed with Wooden and when asked about his speech in a pregame interview with NBC, Coughlin said he also told his players that "They deserve to win. I even told them that I love them."

His speech was only a slight variation on the theme Coughlin hit in his Saturday night address four years ago in Glendale, Ariz. That speech before Super Bowl XLII was about "pride, poise, team and belief in each other." He also had Lt. Col Greg Gadson, an Iraqi war vet who had lost both his legs in combat, speak to his team that night. And the highlight video music was Green Day's "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)."

It sounded as if it was a bit more personal this time, which makes sense — at least based on what Giants co-owner John Mara saw from this team. When he spoke to the media last week, Mara noted how unusually close this team is and how much all of the players and coaches seem to care about each other.

That's what struck him most about the 2011 Giants.

"I think I was struck how much camaraderie there is with this team," Mara said. "These guys really get along. They really believe in one another and the work ethic all through the season has been tremendous. They never got down on themselves. They never stopped believing in themselves. I think that comes from the head coach and I think it permeates throughout the rest of the team."