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Pandemic forces Cowboys to make annual holiday visit to local children’s hospitals through video calls

Because of COVID-19 safeguards, Cowboys players were unable to make their annual, in-person holiday visits. But some traditions must continue somehow.



Because of COVID-19 safeguards, Cowboys players were unable to make their annual, in-person holiday visit to hospitals in the Dallas and Fort Worth area. (Scottish Rite for Children)



By Michael Gehlken

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In some respects, this is routine for her.

The five-hour commute from Lubbock to Dallas. The extended hospital stay.

Haylie, 11, was born with spina bifida, a congenital condition related to the spine’s development. She and her family of loyal Cowboys fans — attending home games on Thanksgiving is a 27-year tradition, she says — frequently have visited Scottish Rite for Children over the past decade.

Her current visit is unlike the rest.

“It’s a little bit harder here because of the pandemic,” Haylie said. “The last time that I was in the But when they do stuff like this here, it helps. It’s a little bit better for me [than] to see family because see y’all.”

On Friday, Haylie was among the patients at four local children’s hospitals whom Cowboys played a question about their favorite Christmas memory as a child. She listened to players’ attempt to sing

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Haylie, 11, was among the patients at four local children’s hospitals whom Cowboys players visited via video call Friday, December 18, 2020. (Courtesy of Scottish Rite Hospital)

Her grandparents are going to be jealous.

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As a solution, socially distanced and face-masked players changed into blue Santa hats following a walk-through practice at The Star. They were divided into four rotations, each assigned to Cook Children’s Medical Center in Fort Worth, Scottish Rite, Medical City Children’s Hospital or Children’s Medical Center Dallas.

At one hospital, a patient was asked to name his favorite Cowboys players. He listed a few. One of those listed, running back Ezekiel Elliott, was present in the video call. Elliott stood up. Encouraged by Cowboys players, the patient showed Elliott his best imitation of Elliott’s signature “feed me” celebration, scooping an imaginary utensil of food toward his mouth.

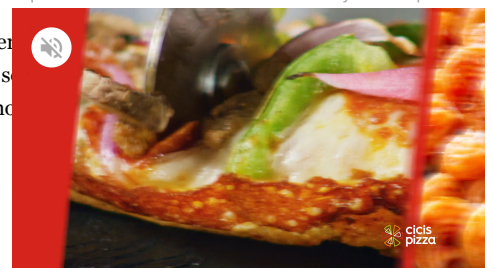
Players cheered. Elliott did the celebration back.

A connection was formed by video call, both patient and Elliott wearing a face mask, miles apart | Up Next - Chris Broussard: 'The Dak-less Cowboys were impressi

“It was still nice to have the opportunity to visit with the kids and try to be a shining light for them... quote distributed by the team. “It’s important that we were able to get on these calls and talk to s out with us. It felt really good to do something for [them]. We haven’t been able to do what we no give back this way for these kids, it was special.”

Linebacker Sean Lee has grown accustomed to the holiday visits.

He is in his 11th year with the franchise.



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with them and see how inspirational they are and try to help them in any way, it's incredible that we can still do it during this tough time."

Haylie was happy for her Cowboys guests.

For safety, Scottish Rite limits patients to one family guest at a time.

She sat Friday afternoon inside a large room at Scottish Rite with several other patients, all of whom also wore masks. The children asked players various questions. Defensive end Aldon Smith's favorite moment as a Cowboy, he said, was his fumble recovery for a touchdown last Sunday against the Cincinnati Bengals. Linebacker Jaylon Smith's advice for dealing with a medical situation was to have a "clear eye view" and persevere.

At one point, a Cowboys player began singing, "Feliz Navidad." His limited lyric memorization soon quieted him.

The song transitioned to "We Wish You a Merry Christmas."

"I like the song, but their singing was all right," Haylie said with a laugh. "They've got pretty deep voices, so they weren't able to hit the high notes."

All in the holiday spirit.



Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott talking with patients at one of four local children's hospitals Cowboys players virtually visited Friday, December 18, 2020. (Courtesy of the Dallas Cowboys)



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BY TIM COWLISHAW

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Michael Gehlken. Michael Gehlken joined the Cowboys beat for the Dallas Morning News in August 2019. This marks his 12th season covering the NFL, previously having reported on the San Diego Chargers and Oakland Raiders.

[✉ michael.gehken@dallasnews.com](mailto:michael.gehken@dallasnews.com) [🐦 GehlkenNFL](https://twitter.com/GehlkenNFL)

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