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## NFL Playoffs Begin - Bowling for Dollars, Big Dollars

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE  
December 26, 1991

Now that Christmas is over and we are headed to the New Year it's time to suit up and get ready to hit the line hard. Tis the season to go bowling, fa la la la la, la la la la. Tis also the season for the National Football League to begin its second season with the opening of the playoffs.

Beginning tomorrow the NFL and America's institutions of higher learning will bring us twenty-four football games over the next nine days, and even better, twenty games over the next five days. I'll bet the Japanese can't match that level of production in either quantity or quality.

The opening of the NFL playoffs tomorrow is a reminder of just how much the NFL and the TV people are driven by money. Over the past decade the playoff system has grown and grown so that now, not only do all six division winners make it to the second season, but so do four other teams, two from each conference. This can lead to some very mediocre teams in post-season play. A place in the playoffs can be as dependent on what conference you are in and the weakness of your schedule, as it is on the actual quality of your team. For example, last Sunday Miami and the New Jersey Jets played for a playoff spot, while the San Francisco 49ers will be watching on TV. Miami and the Jets both finished with 8-8 records, while the 49ers were 10-6, winning their last six games, and demolishing the playoff bound Bears 52-14 last Monday night.

At any rate the first-round of the NFL playoffs begin this weekend with several mediocre teams taking the field, while the NFL owners count their revenues. Next weekend the real playoffs begin.

The season has been an interesting one. The big disappointments have to be in San Francisco where injuries and personnel changes have kept the Niners from another shot at the Super Bowl. Also high on the disappointment list are the Minnesota Vikings who have never recovered from the Herschel Walker trade. Viking GM Mike Lynn will become a legendary figure for that one, and retiring coach Jerry Burns will become a footnote in Viking history.

On the other hand there have been several surprises. The level of play exhibited by the Washington Redskins has been beyond the expectations of most fans, while the reemergence of the Dallas

Cowboys under the leadership of Jimmy Johnson demonstrates that Johnson is much more than a slick doo. All those Dallas and Miami haters out there must just feel great. No doubt many were also surprised by the return of the Atlanta Falcons to the playoffs, but then Jerry Glanville has done this before in other locations.

The only really consistent team has been the beloved Bucs, who now are clearly operating under the curse of Doug Williams. It is a cliché that you win as a team and lose as a team. In the case of the Bucs you lose as a franchise. Everyone up and down the organization deserves credit for this marvelous display of ineptitude. It has been a total effort for nearly a decade. But this year may mark a new high as the Bucs will not have a first round draft choice to waste, because they already gave it away for Chris Chandler who the Bucs released before the season was over.

Meanwhile the College Bowl season is already underway. Two games, the California Bowl and the Aloha Bowl are behind us. Can anyone, not an alumnus of one of the schools involved, remember who played in these games, let alone who won. Sixteen more bowls will be played between now and the end of New Year's night. Why?

Money, Money, Money, Money, Money, and of course don't forget the Money. When it is all over the participating schools will take home a tidy \$25.6M. Where does this money come from? First, and foremost it comes from television, which means it comes from commercial time sold by the networks involved. Then it comes from corporate sponsors, from the large national firms to the local companies at each bowl site who hope to make some money off the crowds attracted to their city. Finally it comes from the fans who buy the tickets, a group that includes the students and alumni of the participating schools as well as corporate buyers who will use the bowls as a place to entertain clients. Money, money, money, money.

By late February who will remember much about these games other than the participants and some of the spectators? With the exception of games involving a national championship, or a particularly stunning turn of events at a game, most of these contests quickly fade into oblivion. And this year there is in effect no match-up for the national championship, although several games have single teams with a shot at number one.

As a result of the Bowls Division I-A of NCAA football is the only division of any sport, men's or women's, that does not have

a national championship tournament. In the end does that really matter?

I can remember when the national champion in football was determined by the pollsters at the end of the regular season. Somehow that didn't kill college football, nor did it impact the bowls. Few can remember how many of those national champions were later defeated in bowl games. The fact is few people even care.

So relax and enjoy the orgy of football heading your way. Each game will have its great moments and critical plays and kill a few hours for you. As they say on ESPN, Pig Out.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau wishing you a Happy New Year, and reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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