

12-28-1993

Bowl Mania and Naming Rights

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Bowl Mania and Naming Rights" (1993). *On Sport and Society*. 317.

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
December 28, 1993

Amidst the incessant whining and babbling about who is number one, comes the endless parade of bowl games, in which millions of dollars are spent on advertising, game production, and team payouts. This is matched in the realm of conspicuous waste by the binge of spending indulged in by participating institutions of higher learning to entertain boosters, legislators, and assorted hangers-on who haunt the halls of athletic departments. FSU dropped three-quarters of a million dollars on one recent trip.

As the spectacle plays itself out in this penultimate exercise in amateur athletics, it is the sponsors who shell out millions of dollars in advertising revenues. This has led in recent years to the selling of the name of bowl games, so that at each mention of the game and on each game logo, the product name will be heard and seen.

I don't remember which bowl holds the distinction of having first sold its name, but I do think it was the former Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas, now the John Hancock Bowl. This is not a patriotic reference, but rather the name of an insurance company, which is not located in El Paso.

It is a measure of just how low one is on the ladder when a bowl does not have a sponsor's name in the title. The Las Vegas, Hall of Fame, and Freedom Bowls, all hold this dubious distinction. The Rose Bowl is the other one without a sponsor's name in the title, but that has happened by choice. Rose Bowl officials believe in the traditions of the Tournament of Roses Pageant, and have held out on sponsorships. How long this can last is a matter of conjecture, but I don't believe it will be much longer.

What has been let loose into bowl mania is a marvelous array of bowl sponsorship names, which add to the general festive character of bowling and in the process some bowl genres have emerged.

Automobiles and automotive related products make up the largest current bowl genre, beginning with the Jeep-Eagle Aloha Bowl on Christmas Day from Honolulu. Then there is the Thrifty Car Rental Holiday Bowl from San Diego. One can only assume that all of the important visiting dignitaries to San Diego will be met at Lindbergh Field by the Thrifty Shuttle Bus and taken over to

the Thrifty offices where they could then pick up their cars and sign their collision waivers.

Meanwhile in Fort Lauderdale what once was called the Sunshine Bowl, and then the Blockbuster Bowl, is now the Carquest Bowl. Although some may think that a Carquest is a sort of search for your car in a crowded parking lot, in fact the Carquest Bowl is sponsored by a line of car care products for detailing, a process that in pre-yuppie days was called washing, waxing, and cleaning.

Another automotively related bowl is one of the larger ones, the Mobil Cotton Bowl, which may sound like a moveable feast but of course is Mobil not mobile. At this point it might be easy to make a mistake and assume that the Alamo Bowl is another car rental bowl. But no, it is in fact a bowl named after an historical place and event in San Antonio, Texas. It is also named after a home improvement store, as its full title is now the Builder's Square Alamo Bowl. Remember the Builder's Square Alamo!

Also in the home improvement category is the Poulan Weed- Eater Independence Bowl, which may have the distinction of the most bizarre name of all the bowls, at least until this year when the Gator Bowl sold itself to a restaurant chain. It is now the Outback Steakhouse Gator Bowl, or is it the Steakout Outhouse or the Outhouse Steakout Gator Bowl. Whatever! Formerly in the food category with Domino's is the Weiser Lock Copper Bowl, which in Las Vegas would make it the only true lock of all the bowl games.

The Saint Jude Liberty Bowl is to my knowledge the only bowl with religious implications, named for the patron of lost causes. This is a good omen for the 6 and 5 Michigan State Spartans, who somehow still wound up in a bowl game.

Rounding out this year's bowl sponsorship bonanza are the CompUSA Citrus Bowl here in the City Beautiful, the IBM\052 Fiesta Bowl, and the Federal Express Orange Bowl which will try to guarantee overnight delivery of the mythical national championship to the winner. Finally there is the grand mouthful of all the bowl games, the always popular former USF&G Sugar Bowl, which this year adds one more word to become the USF&G Insurance Sugar Bowl. Check out the new logo, it could inspire you to upgrade your term life.

Next year I propose a playoff between the winners of the Independence Bowl and the Freedom Bowl in what will be called

the Political Philosophy Bowl. The Sponsor? How about Jerry Falwell and People for the American Way?

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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