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Super Disappointment - Agassi and the Australian Open

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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For the gazillionth time the Super Bowl has proven to anything but. In less than five minutes the San Francisco Forty-Niners demonstrated that the San Diego Chargers were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The one good thing was that the game was never at issue, and those who wanted to party could get on with it immediately. By the third quarter bowling looked exciting along side what was happening in Miami. Even the commercials proved a disappointment, with the possible exception of Dennis Hopper's Patton parody.

It was however a record setter. Jerry Rice set three career marks--points, receptions and yards gained. He also shared the record for most points in a game with Rickey Waters. This game is the highest scoring Super Bowl on record and San Francisco scored the most points ever in a first quarter, 14. The Niners now have the most Super Bowl victories, 5, and Steve Young the most touchdown passes in a Super Bowl, 6. You could see the gorilla leap off his back when that record went into the books erasing the name Joe Montana.

And mark this, with the Most Valuable Player Award going to Steve Young, he becomes the second ex-Tampa Bay Bucs quarterback to achieve that honor. The first was Doug Williams when he led Washington over Denver 42-10 with his record setting performance in Super Bowl XXII.

Another oversold and overmatched Super Bowl is history and once more the football fans of America see the most hyped event in all of sport come up a major disappointment. Appropriately the two NBA games on national TV Sunday were also blowouts.

The least hyped and nearly neglected sporting event of the year also came to a conclusion on Super Sunday downunder, as the Australian Open Tennis Championships concluded. Although it was Sunday in Australia it was Saturday night here in the States when this premier grand slam event began. From the start it had everything over the Super Bowl. An Australian singer with a beautifully clear voice sang a marvelously arranged version of "Waltzing Matilda" at center court in Flinders Park. The unofficial national anthem of Australia outshone the official one of the U.S. which was delivered by a talk show host before the Super Bowl.

The men's final offered up high powered and nearly flawless tennis in a match of singular quality. Andre Agassi, looking like the original Tampa Bay Buccaneer, with bandana over his head and a highly groomed sloppy look to his clothes, played tennis with a power and grace that he has never before displayed. It just may be that Agassi has finally lived up to his hype. He had an answer for everything that Pete Sampras could throw at him, and slowly ground down the defending champion who was constantly pressed to maintain perfection just to survive. If Andre Agassi has come of age men's tennis will be the better for it.

A few days earlier in the quarterfinals Pete Sampras and Jim Courier offered another reason why men's tennis may be entering a new golden age. These two played a five-setter with Courier winning the first two sets, twice going to match game, only to lose to the tremendously determined and inspired Sampras, who was emotionally strung out. Sampras' coach and friend Tim Gullikson had returned to the U.S. with heart problems, and when a spectator urged Sampras to win for Gullikson, Pete was reduced to tears. The match went well past midnight with Sampras winning the final three sets, facing defeat several times while being emotionally overwrought. It was immediately proclaimed one of the greatest matches in Australian Open History. This too was buried by Super Bowl hype in the U.S.

And finally it is worth noting that the women's championship in Australia was won by Mary Pierce over Arancha Sanchez-Vacario in straight sets. After a first set in which neither player ever got their rhythm, Pierce suddenly hit stride and played nearly flawless tennis winning her first grand slam title. Pierce played with a style combining power and grace that was a joy to behold, and given her personal struggles it was doubly so.

Mary Pierce has grown up on the courts under the watchful eye of her father who routinely reduced her to tears, and made an international disgrace of himself. Now banned from tennis venues and divorced from Mary's French mother he is no longer there to destroy his daughter's game. We are now beginning to see the Mary Pierce that many have long suspected was there, and it is a sight which offers great promise for the future of women's tennis.

So it was a Super Week after all, although it took place in Australia and not in Miami, as two young tennis champions took a major step forward from potential to stardom.

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

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