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Super Bowl Almost Super - Magic Johnson's Exile

Richard C. Crepeau

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

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Is it over? Has the hype finally ended, or is it still echoing in your head almost a week after the clock ran out on the Pittsburgh Steelers.

For the first time in several years the Super Bowl almost lived up to its name. The football game remained interesting throughout, if not an artistic success.

It looked more like two games. For the first quarter and a half the Cowboys dominated and took a 13-0 lead. For the next two and a half quarters the Steelers dominated, but despite the domination could not win the game. The great equalizer was defense, and both teams played some, and the Cowboys played enough to hold on and win the game.

Larry Brown was voted MVP but certainly there must be a major assist for Neil O'Donnell and the Steeler receivers. Twice O'Donnell, for whatever reason, found Larry Brown wide open and hit him with near perfect passes. The only problem was that Brown plays for the Cowboys and O'Donnell for the Steelers. Other than that it was picture perfect passing.

The pre-game analysis consistently pointed to the Dallas offensive line as being the major difference between the two teams. The conventional wisdom was that by the fourth quarter the Cowboys line would have totally worn down the Steelers defense. Of course it didn't happen because the Cowboy offensive line was only on the field about nine of the thirty minutes of the second half, and so they had time to wear down no one except the Dallas sideline assistants.

One of the most interesting matchups of the day was Jerry Jones and Paul Tagliabue with the Commissioner firing heavy salvos at Jerry on "Meet the Press" while Jones had the final word autographing hundred dollar bills and accepting the Vince Lombardi Trophy from the Commish.

The other memorable feature of the day, if anything could top Jones autographing hundred dollar bills for pure low rent crassness, were the commercials. At \$40,000 per second these mini-dramas and comedies with extremely high production values remain some of the best in American cinema today. The Pee Wee football parody of NFL Films highlights was excellent, Deion and the roadrunner, several of the Pepsi ads, and the Mcdonald's

rocking baby piece were creative and entertaining--something that could not be said for the game plan of either team.

The other major story of the week, and surprisingly there was a story that could intrude into Super Bowl airspace, was the announcement that Magic Johnson was returning to the Los Angeles Lakers.

Since his departure in 1991 Johnson has threatened to come back once, came back for the Olympics, came back to coach, thought about coming back several times, and now is back. Tuesday night in Los Angeles against the Golden State Warriors about two and a half minutes into the game Johnson came onto the floor greeted by a standing ovation. Although he missed his first shot, Johnson played some quality minutes and showed flashes of that old Magic on the fast break, even though he is no longer very fast. The no-look pass, the great fake and move to the basket, were a reminder of games past, and the familiar smile were a reminder that he still is Magic Johnson. He finished with 19 points, 10 assists, and 8 rebounds, nearly a triple double and almost exactly his career averages.

Looking back on the approximately five years of enforced exile from the NBA, it is sad to think of how many of the great Magic Johnson years were lost. How many records were not broken? How many triple-doubles were not recorded? How many games not won?

And why? Basically because not enough was known about a disease that carried a fear factor usually associated with virulent forms of cancer in modern times. HIV seemed to be a certain death sentence, and the transmission of the disease was explained largely by unfounded rumors and general misinformation.

The NBA administrative hierarchy reacted with panic, as did the players, and the pressures on Johnson were so great that he retired, and then re-retired after briefly attempting a comeback. In addition Johnson and his doctors were uncertain of the impact that the physical stress of playing professional basketball might have on the virus he was carrying in his body. So in a combination of ignorance, fear, and misinformation Magic Johnson's career ended, and both Magic and the fans were robbed of some of his best years of competition.

Tuesday night he looked heavy and slow but still with those flashes of brilliance. The point totals and assists indicate

that he still may have much to contribute. Ervin Magic Johnson is back. Let's hope that the Magic is back as well.

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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