

Super Bowl XXXV and its Excesses

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Is there anyone alive in the United States today who does not know that the Super Bowl is coming up on Sunday? It is Super Bowl XXXV, thirty-five in real numbers, and will be played in Tampa. One can only wonder if we will see the designation "Super Bowl L" or "Super Bowl C" or if they will be considered too timid in Logo Land. But I digress.

Arriving at Super Bowl XXXV is impressive in and of itself. It seems like only a few years ago that we were at Super Bowl XXIV. My, oh my, how the X's fly by when you're having fun.

One wonders if Tampa will be able to exceed the excesses of the previous thirty-four events.*** This mid-winter festival has been turned into one glorious obscenity of conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure and conspicuous waste here in the high holy days of the American Empire.

There would be little surprise if Caligula were to appear on the sidelines or at the Commissioner's party. In fact he would hardly be noticed among the revelers. Tampa will need to be at the top of its decadent form to outdo its predecessors, but rest assured it will make a run at it even if the police are hell bent to enforce the six-foot rule on nude dancers. Some might call this a "decent interval" while others see it as repression. Eugene Robinson of Athletes-Looking-for-Action can only be dismayed.

The Super Bowl has become a place for the wealthy to display their wealth to the public and to one another. If you don't arrive by private jet for the Super Bowl then why come at all? It is estimated that over 1000 private jets will land at the several airports in the Bay area starting on Thursday. This will represent a doubling of the number of private and corporate jets that arrived for College Basketball's Final Four in 1999. And this fact may be the real difference between college and professional sport.

Beyond the corporate jets the skies will be filled around the Bay Area producing an air traffic controller's nightmare. A B-2 Bomber will fly over the stadium while Ray Charles sings "America the Beautiful" and the Air Force

Thunderbirds will grace the skies during the National Anthem. With a bevy of banner towing planes, a brace of blimps, and fourteen helicopters providing shuttle service for the Fortune 500 fans the air corridors around Tampa will be jammed for Super Bowl XXXV.

If private planes and helicopters are too plebeian for you then you need "Silent Wings II," the modest 104-foot yacht featuring a staff of four including a gourmet chef. The luxury accommodation features a Jacuzzi along with "his" and "her" bathrooms in the largest of the suites. This package comes with six luxury suite tickets to the big game and a chauffeured Rolls-Royce. All of this for a modest \$100,000.

Indeed the yacht may be the best means of assuring a ticket to the game, if that really matters to anyone. Most game tickets go to NFL officials, corporate sponsors, and politicians. And most of these will be delivered as freebies. A reserved seat ticket at face value is \$325, while street value late last week was hitting near \$4000.

So who needs the game?! It's the parties that count.

As the Super Bowl has become basically a corporate event, workers have been assembling 17 huge tents, compared to nine in 1991, that executives and their guests will use for pre-game and post-game festivities on Super Bowl Sunday. The largest, 100 x 360 feet will accommodate more than 1,500 people. The carpeted, climate-controlled structures contain everything from big-screen TVs to a giant ship's mast. In addition the 800,000-square-foot corporate hospitality area is being transformed into a pseudo-beach. There will be 10-foot-tall macaw statues, 25-foot-tall lifeguard chairs, and a sandcastle.

A tent complete with food and entertainment can cost a company as much as \$750,000, while added features can run the price to \$1.5M. Coca-Cola, Ford and Prudential are noted for the opulence of their tents. The NFL keeps details under wraps because big corporate sponsors, unlike individuals, often don't want shareholders or customers to know how much they're spending. And no wonder. A staff of 500 will be serving such entrees as Lower Keys Conch Chowder, prime rib and salmon. Upscale brands of liquor and such treats as Maryland crab cakes (\$475 per 50 guests) or leg of lamb (\$250). Fresh popcorn is available for \$6.50

per person. Several tents have high-priced performers such as the Spinners and the Classic Rock All-Stars, a band that includes Bernie Leadon and Randy Meisner, former members of the Eagles.

For the largest companies, a four-day Super Bowl trip can cost as much as \$10,000 per person, so if a company brings 150 guests, the cost would be about \$1.5M. It is the priciest event in sportsworld and of course worth every tax deductible dollar of it.

Not to be overshadowed in the excess sweepstakes the City of Tampa has dropped \$350,000 into flowers and other landscape enhancements for public properties; while the county is paying Team Sandtastic of Sarasota \$628,000 to build a Super Bowl Sand Montage in Sand Key Park. Two 30-foot tall NFL helmets with logos of the Ravens and Giants on either side of the Lombardi Trophy will be surrounded by 29 other helmets 6-feet in height. All sculpted of sand, of course.

It just goes on and on and on in this weeklong string of parties with or without hot and cold running celebrities. Perhaps the pinnacle of excess comes via television where a 30-second commercial will bring an average price of \$2.3M, enough to run a small country. Needless to say CBS has no difficulty selling these slots.

It's hard to believe but when Thorstein Veblen wrote about Conspicuous Consumption and Conspicuous Waste over a century ago, he had never even seen a Super Bowl.

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.

***For a look at previous Super Bowl excesses see:
"Rah, Rah, the Money!" at www.PopPolitics.com

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