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Excess and the Internet at the Super Bowl

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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 XXXVI, thirty-six in real numbers, and will be played in what should be the permanent home of the Super Bowl, New Orleans. There is no venue more appropriate, save perhaps Vegas, for this mid-winter festival of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous waste, not to mention decadence, in these high holy days of the American Empire.

Like those who worship the sun, Americans who worship football, money, and excess take this opportunity in dead of winter to pay tribute to the notion that sheer waste is the highest form of display.

There will be little surprise if Caligula appears on the sidelines or at the Commissioner's party. In fact he would hardly be noticed among the revelers of the Crescent City. In Atlanta the NFL was concerned that the players would be seen at the Gold Club. In New Orleans there is no need for a Gold Club, the city itself serves that function.

On a planet plagued by collapsed and collapsing economies, the ravages of war and malnutrition, and the human struggle for survival, Americans this weekend will launch into levels of consumption that challenge the boundaries of the merely vulgar and obscene.

The Super Bowl has become a place for the wealthy to display their wares to the public and to one another. If you don't arrive by private jet for the Super Bowl then why come at all? 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.

For the largest companies, a four-day Super Bowl trip for executives, employees, and clients 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.
There are however changes in our post-9/11 world. The six-hour television pre-game show has been pared down to three hours. FOX found it was having difficulty selling pre-game commercial time in our more chaste times. Indeed the price tag on commercials has failed to rise over the previous year's rates for the first time in human history.

The big change is that the Dot Com companies and the Dot Com millionaires are an endangered species. No doubt that will also be true of Enron Executives and the bigwigs from Arthur Anderson. Even Dick Cheney would not want to be seen with them these days, not even at his undisclosed location.

Another difference is the NFL's heightened emphasis on social action and social conscience. Kurt Warner and Donovan McNabb will take part in a donation of 10,000 cans of soup to the Second Harvesters Food Bank of Greater New Orleans. This is a Campbell Soup/NFL project and part of the 500,000 can Super Bowl donation and the 6 Million cans donated this year as part of the "Tackling Hunger Program." NFL fans have participated in the program all year by going to HYPERLINK http://www.chunky.com www.chunky.com and clicking on the helmet of their favorite team. Each click produced a one-can donation. "The Super Bowl has a "Souper" Cause,"--their line, not mine. One hopes this does not cause flashbacks among older fans who remember only too well the days of soup lines for the middle class.

There has always been an excessive display of nationalism or patriotism at this event and of course this year, as was the case during Desert Storm, there will be a blowout of patriotic sentiment. The Boston Pops Orchestra will be on hand to provide accompaniment to Mary Blige and Marc Anthony for the pre-game "America the Beautiful." Then they will accompany Mariah Carey for the National Anthem. Some may see the choice of Carey as bad timing as an industry executive recently noted that Carey's "expiration code had past," while commenting on the cancellation of her record contract. These will all be preceded by Paul McCartney's tribute to heroes.

Halftime, or rather the E*TRADE SUPER BOWL XXXVI HALFTIME SHOW will feature U-2 and a lot of post 9/11 salutes. So maybe not all the Dot Com's have vanished. The Friday Night Super Bowl Bash features Sting and No Doubt as sort of a warm-up for the excesses of Sunday.
For those who like to put a little religion into Super Sunday there will be the 2002 Super Bowl Gospel Celebration early in the afternoon featuring major gospel groups and talent. Proceeds will benefit the Special Olympics of New Orleans and Christian Athletes United for Spiritual Empowerment (CAUSE). Well-known NFL evangelist Deion Sanders has endorsed this event saying "It bridges partnerships between top 'spiritual acts' and key 'spiritual athletes,'" always a test of spiritual values.

For the hearty of spirit and all true iron-butt football fanatics ten television networks will offer over 100 hours of Super Bowl programming. If this isn't some sort of record I don't want to know.

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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