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Nicollette Sheridan bares all

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Nicollette Sheridan bares all
NOVEMBER 16, 2004

Attention Hypocrites! Your future is in the executive suites of television networks and the officialdom of the National Football League. The only requirement is that you have the ability to make self-righteous pronouncements about public morality and taste while maintaining your composure and never once betraying yourself with so much as a hint of a smile. Even, the now fashionable smirk, will not be tolerated. If you get really good at this and have a relative in the cabinet you might even be appointed to head the FCC.

This week's firestorm over the opening skit on Monday Night Football has produced a festival of hypocrisy, a cornucopia of foolishness, and a tribute to the sheer idiocy of what passes itself off as the guardianship of public morality. What exactly was it that was offensive about the spot in which Nicollette Sheridan playing her role from "Desperate Housewives" dropped a towel in an attempt to seduce Terrell Owens of the Philadelphia Eagles? It is difficult to tell really.

Was it the suggestion of seduction that showed nothing but the nekkid back of the actress? Was it the total disregard for the cleanliness of a towel? Perhaps it was the notion that a successful seduction could impact the point spread on the game? Not since Janet Jackson malfunctioned has there been so much ado about so little.

Indeed the Super Bowl exposure is the only thing in recent memory that produced this kind of firestorm over a televised sporting event. That assault on public morality led to a decision by ABC television to put a five-second delay on its live sports programming. Unfortunately that gutless exercise in censorship at ABC, initiated by fear of the National Football League, has not saved the nation from the terrible towel incident.

It is difficult to know where to begin. The National Football League office issued a statement that called the skit "inappropriate and unsuitable" for the Monday Night Football audience. ABC apologized for the incident saying that they agreed the "placement was inappropriate." ABC received calls and e-mails from viewers objecting to the airing of the skit. FCC

Chairman Michael Powell wondered if Walt Disney would be proud, and questioned the judgment of ABC executives. The FCC also promised a full investigation. The Philadelphia Eagles issued a statement saying they wished the segment had not aired. Tony Dungy, head coach of the Indianapolis Colts, said he found it "racially offensive," and that he did not like the stereotyping of the players.

To start with Tony Dungy's view, although one might understand his reaction, this firestorm is clearly not about race. In fact when I saw the skit that is about the only thing that didn't occur to me. I thought it was mildly funny, in the typical bad taste that has marked ABSleaze and American commercial television over that last several decades, and I was struck by the remarkable lack of seductiveness conveyed by Ms. Sheridan.

The notion that the NFL found it "inappropriate and unsuitable" to the Monday Night Football audience is very funny indeed. This is the same NFL that presumably finds the commercials for "erectile dysfunction" suitable. The limp garden hose gaining strength, the horns coming out of the head of a middle-something man when he sees a negligee on a mannequin, two people naked in bathtubs watching a sunset, or any number of other scenes announcing imminent intercourse, all reach or exceed the bad taste achieved by Sheridan and Owens in their now much viewed mini-drama.

Would Walt Disney have been proud of this? Probably not, but he would have had to admit that there was a certain level of marketing savvy on display here. Picking up on this in the days following the firestorm, ABC has been promoting "Desperate Housewives" with equally subtle spots on the ABC owned ESPN family of sports networks.

As for Terrell Owens, he said that he found the skit clean and inoffensive and that people were taking it out of context. He also said that if anyone was offended he wanted to apologize. About the only person not heard from so far is Ms. Sheridan or someone from the towel industry.

It is quite interesting to note that ABC agreed that the placement of the segment was inappropriate, although the network did not comment on the segment itself. It is also worth noting that ABC is losing an estimated \$170M each year on its telecasts of Monday Night Football. In rationalizing losses incurred by overpaying for sporting events, the networks argue that the events themselves are so important that they recoup the losses

by cross-promoting the remainder of their programming. In this case not only has ABC cross promoted "Desperate Housewives" but they have achieved countless hours of free advertising for it and for Monday Night Football.

This brings us to yet another aspect of the hypocrisy of the moment. If you watched cable news or cable sports and any other local and network news programming over the last few days, you should now have the entire segment etched permanently in your memory bank because you have seen it anywhere from thirty to 150 times. This skit was so horrible and so inappropriate that news editors across the nation have determined that it must be shown over and over and over again.

In the end the only sensible comment came from T.O. When asked if he was shocked by the fact that this story appeared on the front pages across America, he indicated he was not, saying simply, "I always make the front page."

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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