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Super Bowl Hype

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Super Bowl Hype
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The Reverend Norman Vincent Peale once claimed that if Jesus were alive today he would be at the Super Bowl.

Peale, erstwhile guru of the Power of Positive Thinking and an advocate of Smiling Christianity, as Jonathan Edwards so aptly called it, may have been on to something. Indeed all indications are that God is already in Jacksonville even as this is being written. Always a step ahead of humanity, God arrived in Jacksonville before either the Eagles or the Patriots.

The Deity seems to be very busy in the host-city of Super Bowl XXXIX. At the website, "First Down, First Coast" (fdfc.org), you can get the complete scoop. Organized by the Jacksonville Baptist Association, "First Down, First Coast" sees the big game as "a chance to share the love and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ with hundreds, even thousands of people both in our own community and with those visiting our city." Four years in the planning, the activities began last Saturday with a "Super March for Jesus" from downtown J'ville out to the stadium by several thousand people.

None of this is particularly novel. Religious groups have been using the Super Bowl as a vehicle to spread the word for several years now. The Minister of Defense, Reggie White, distributed Super Bowl party and Super Bowl halftime kits that were a regular feature of the Super Weekend. Organizations such as Athletes in Action and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes have long been sanctioned by the NFL to offer events at the Super Bowl.

There may be more of these sorts of activities at Super Bowl XXXIX because of the location of the game so near to the buckle of the Bible belt. If you're in the city and looking for some religious action just ask the people wearing the T-shirts announcing, "Fired Up for Jesus," or "Pray Hard." They would be more than happy to serve.

This is only the beginning.

At media day it was revealed to the unenlightened that the Eagles Terrell Owens will play on Sunday. Although not cleared

by the doctors, he has been "cleared to play by God." Owens told reporters that his quick healing from injury is the result of God's power.

Owens went on to say that if you don't believe in miracles, then just wait until Sunday. He attributes his quick healing to the power of prayer. Several people have been to his house to pray, including two teammates who came with their "personal pastors." I must admit this is new to me. Personal trainers yes, but personal pastors? I guess there is a certain symmetry here of the physical and the spiritual.

Owens also told reporters, "I got hurt for a reason; I understand that. God is using me to put me on a platform. To show how great he is." T.O. an instrument of the Almighty! A novel thought indeed.

Super Bowl XXXIX is clearly the most important of all the Super Bowls in history. To my recollection God has never had this level of involvement in any previous Super Bowl. Indeed if the Eagles win I would expect God to be named MVP.

Unfortunately She will not be going to Disney World. The people at the Mouse House announced recently that the "I'm Going to Disney World" promotion would not be done this year. For the first time since 1987 Disney will not be there to set the travel itinerary of the winners. Mouse officials say simply that the company is already involved in two other major ad campaigns and so will pass on this year's Super Hero. It might also be the passing of an era.

Other things have not changed. The blowout prices of commercials continue to rise faster than the salaries of America's athletes. Thirty seconds of commercial time on FOX will cost \$2.4M. More food will be consumed on Super Sunday than any other day in America except Thanksgiving. The obscene array of extravagance that has become so common at this midwinter festival shows no sign of abating. The Super Bowl remains an event where a certain segment of America's business elite can entertain and dazzle one another and seek favors from politicians who wallow in the illusion of wealth and power.

The Super Bowl for all that it is, and for all that it has become over the years, remains ultimately a tribute to Thorstein Veblen's brilliant analysis of the extravagance of America's vulgar rich at the end of the 19th century. Conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure, and conspicuous waste, have

produced no better stage than the Super Bowl. It remains a great celebration of the midwinter season and a great obscenity in a world where too many people have more money to spend than is good for them.

One might hope that at some point such extravagance will finally be reined in or even reduced. One might naively hope that the presence of Jesus in Jacksonville might produce some measure of moderation. Miracles indeed! When the head of the "First Down, First Coast" committee sees his activity as serving that of the business culture which he correctly describes as at the heart of the Super Bowl, there can be little hope for change.

So in the spirit of resignation like most everyone else across America I will go to a Super Bowl Party, eat the munchies, drink the beer, and watch the commercials. I will anxiously await this year's malfunction, while wondering if Fox's Joe Buck will find anything on this Super Weekend that will disgust him in a Randy Moss kind of way.

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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