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Super Bowl LV

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - SUPER BOWL LV
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Super Bowl LV has come and gone and it will forever occupy a unique place in the History of the NFL. The game itself was a throwback to many earlier games that simply did not live up to the hype. What was billed as a great matchup that was likely to be won by whomever had the last possession of the game, turned out to be a lop-sided contest decided by halftime, or at the latest, the middle of the third quarter.

On the other hand, it was a Super Bowl reshaped by the realities of Covid-19, which affected the teams and all aspects of the normal two-week celebration. The mid-winter holiday played out in a very different atmosphere, with all sorts of constraints on nearly every facet of the Super Bowl. The normal two weeks of hype were essentially reduced to one week or less.

Super Bowl tickets are always at a premium and always expensive, and for SB LV tickets were limited. Attendance in Raymond James Stadium was set at 22,500 to comply with Covid-19 restrictions. Of those, 7,000 were given free to front line medical workers. The fact that for the first time the home team was playing in their home stadium, placed a heavy demand on tickets. When the ticket market opened, the price per ticket was at \$8,550 with a minimum four ticket purchase from "NFL On Location." With fees added, the price came to \$40,356 or \$10,089 each.

At Ticketmaster on Monday, tickets were going for anywhere from \$6,000 to \$40,000. By Friday prices had come down a bit with the low-end at Ticketmaster at \$5000 and at StubHub at \$4200. There was one suite available for \$226,560. By Saturday, the low end prices had changed very little, but the high end dropped to \$28,000 at Ticketmaster and \$20,000 at StubHub with a large number of seats in the \$15,000 to \$20,000 range.

Television ratings are always of interest, and in the last few years, difficult to analyze because the game was delivered on so many non-TV platforms. This year it was available on the CBS Television Network, CBS Sports and NFL digital properties, Buccaneers and Chiefs mobile properties, Verizon Media mobile properties, and ESPN Deportes television and digital properties. CBS today reported that there were 96.4M viewers. In addition, the live-streamed viewers were up 67% with 5.7M viewers per minute. The most watched game in history was Super Bowl XLIX

with 114.4M viewers, and the highest rated game was Super Bowl XX.

Cost of a thirty-second commercial at Super Bowl LV was the highest ever at \$5.6M and these rates remained about the same this year. Once again there was little difficulty in selling this commercial time, although as late as mid-December, there were still a few slots available. Several companies that had been advertising at the Super Bowl for decades, including Budweiser, Coke, and Pepsi, did not buy, although Pepsi did sponsor the Pepsi Halftime Show brought to you by Pepsi. Others cut back on the numbers of commercials they purchased. Pepsi also sponsored a restaurant challenge event in which several Tampa establishments showcased their featured dishes.

Pre-game activity remained at a high level on TV and on several different media platforms. One of the newcomers was the "Shaq Bowl," hosted by Shaquille O'Neal, featuring celebrities and athletes in competition as Team Tampa Bay and Team Kansas City. In case you have not seen enough Tim Tebow lately, he was on Team Tampa. Among the more traditional pre-game shows Animal Planet presented Puppy Bowl X, and Hallmark presented Kitten Bowl VIII. Puppy Bowl advertising revenue is up 30 percent. At a lower energy level National Geographic Wild offered the Fish Bowl, which true to its name was a continuous broadcast of a fish in a bowl.

On site, the best of the pre-game activity was reportedly the Tick Tok Tailgate hosted by Miley Cyrus with Billy Idol and Joan Jett. It was open only to the frontline workers honored by the NFL with free tickets to the game. For postgame activity, Verizon presented Alicia Keys in concert to promote small business.

Social distancing is more than difficult at this sort of event and indeed it was not always observed. At Super Bowl XXXV, the City of Tampa enacted the six-foot rule at strip clubs, and although that law is still on the books, there was no enforcement of it at this Super Bowl, on the street or in strip clubs. Apparently, it was not an option to take the law and apply it to everyone, although it might have been a good idea particularly at a street party in Ybor City where masks and distancing were not in evidence. 50-Cent also hosted a maskless party in violation of regulations in St. Petersburg.

Super Bowl Sunday has always been about the home parties where friends and family gather. The CDC and Dr. Fauci tried to

discourage these gatherings, and it seems as if there was some success with that effort. However, it is clear that Super Bowl Sunday would still be a day of massive consumption of food and drink. Rather than the big gatherings with massive spreads, the groups were smaller and consumed takeout and snacks along with oceans of beer and rivers of wine. In anticipation of the day, snack producers considerably increased production and got their products into the marketplace. Frito-Lay produced 70-million pounds of snacks the week before the big munchie event. The anticipated chicken wing shortage created a lot of anxiety leading up to the big day. Super Bowl Sunday has become the second largest day of food consumption on the American holiday calendar trailing only Thanksgiving.

Gambling has always been associated with sport and, indeed, may be essential to the very existence of sport. The Super Bowl is one of the biggest gambling events of the year, and there seems to be an unlimited number of kinds of bets one can make. This year, according to the American Gaming Association, gambling was expected to decline with only 23.2M people placing a bet on the game at a cost of \$4.3B. On the upside a record number, 7.6M, will place on-line bets. Worldwide those numbers will be much higher.

For Tampa and the Bay area the Super Bowl has turned out to be less than the anticipated economic bonanza generally predicted for the host city. Nonetheless, hotel occupancy and airline traffic into Tampa Bay was up, giving a lift to these two badly hit sectors of the Florida Tourist economy. In a related development, Disney announced there would be no Super Bowl parade on Monday, although the MVP would make a commercial announcing "I'm going to Disney World."

In other odds and ends: there was a national anthem that managed to offend some people; Vince Lombardi came by to offer advice to Americans, twice; there was an Airforce Flyover; Colin Kaepernick's name was not heard, although Mariah Carey tweeted "Happy Colin Kaepernick Appreciation Day," and there was a mural of him and he appeared on a billboard in Downtown Tampa; the halftime show pleased some and baffled many, as is now traditional; the commercials ranged from bad to good to funny; the three members of the "never miss club" made it to the game to keep their streak intact; Bruce Springsteen showed up in a commercial while the Clydesdales did not; a man ran onto the field to promote a porn website and the radio call of it by Kevin Harlan is worth seeking out; the man who ran onto the

field cashed in a prop bet at \$300,000 by betting that someone would run onto the field; Amanda Gorman demonstrated the beauty of her poetry on a national stage for the second time in less than a month; and so much more.

Perhaps the best thing of all was the fact that at this American Patriotic Mid-winter Festival the Halftime Show presented by Pepsi had as its headliner, Abel Tesfaye a.k.a. The Weeknd, a Canadian Son of Ethiopian Immigrants.

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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