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This is SportsCenter:

Performance and Performativity in Sports Broadcasting and Punditry

Anthony Gunn

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This is SportsCenter:

Performance and Performativity in Sports Broadcasting and Punditry

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Master of Art

Within the discipline of Performance Studies there is a debate about what is included within the ontology of “performance.” Peggy Phelan suggests that performance can only be experienced in the here and now, and any recording of a performance makes it “something other than performance.” Phillip Auslander argues the exact opposite, claiming that mediatized performance is not only valid but also preferable to the live. This thesis is about performance in sports broadcasting, and states that performance, like sport, can be valid in both live and mediatized forms. The thesis also details how sports broadcasters perform and how their performance changes based on the time frame of the sport they are talking about: past, present and future. When sports are televised the process of broadcasting creates voids and gaps in the viewing experience that must be filled by the sportscasters. For past sporting events *SportsCenter*, and highlight shows like it, cut entire sporting events down to segments that only last a few moments. A need is created for these sportscasters to fill in the gaps with their performances, which explain what is happening, analyze how the game was played, and give humor and fun to the

images. When announcers and analysts perform over live games they attempt to make up for the gap in broadcasting by narrativizing the event and turning a contest into a story. They do this by giving background information and histories about the game and players, explaining how the game is played, why events unfolded the way that they did, and bringing excitement to the game by how excited they themselves become. When Sportscasters predict outcomes of future events they usually do so by first looking to the past, and then making prognostications based on either statistical data or on their own “gut” feelings. These predictions are very rarely accurate, and mostly have as much validity as guesses. Through these performances the sportscasters can sometimes greatly enhance a viewing experience of a game, but sometimes they take away from the enjoyment and the essence of the sports they broadcast. Viewers need to be aware of how performers can manipulate, or attempt to manipulate, an audience to keep them tuned in.

Keywords: sports broadcasting, performance studies

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE 1

Introduction

CHAPTER TWO 17

On the Fetish-Character in Sports Programming and the Regression of Watching:
How Sports Programs Perform the Past

CHAPTER THREE 41

The Spectacle and The Live

CHAPTER FOUR 61

Soothsayers and Prognosticators

CHAPTER FIVE 77

Conclusion

WORKS CITED 80

Chapter 1

Introduction

“With a gentle push, and a mild arch, the cow-hide globe hits home.”
Former Utah Jazz announcer Hot Rod Hundley

On 9 January 2005 the Minnesota Vikings played the Green Bay Packers in an NFC wild card playoff game. The Packers were considered heavy favorites in the game, due to the fact that it was played at Lambeau Field in Green Bay and the Packers were considered a much better cold weather team. Green Bay had also won both regular season meetings between the two teams. It was very surprising, for even the most seasoned football fan, to see how Minnesota dominated the game from the beginning. They jumped to a 17 – 0 lead by the half, and at the beginning of the fourth quarter scored a touchdown that realistically put the game out of reach at 31 – 17. After he scored the touchdown, Randy Moss walked to the edge of the end zone, pretended to pull down his pants and then wiggled/wiped himself at the Packers fans and against their goal post. His ‘celebration’ drew this response from Joe Buck, play-by-play announcer for Fox’s football coverage. “That is a disgusting act by Randy Moss. It is unfortunate that we had that on our air live. That is disgusting by Randy Moss.”

Those comments made by Buck, and the severity he placed on the incident were such that Fox did not replay the celebration on its post game show. James Brown, the lead commentator for Fox, called Moss "classless, ignorant and embarrassing" (Zurin). ESPN followed suit, not showing the celebration either, citing that the incident was “tasteless and crass” (Zurin).

But was the celebration really that bad? ESPN started showing it as early as the next day, and often will still show or refer to the event whenever Moss or touchdown celebrations are discussed. Hoards of articles and comments flooded the Internet about Buck’s seeming overreaction. The blogger B-side on TVgasm.com put his disgust in these words:

Joe Buck, BTW, is a whining, pathetic yuppie bastard who hasn't got the nuts necessary to be a Sunday school teacher, let alone (a) sportscaster. His "Little Lord Fauntleroy" act -- on FOX network, no less! -- is what I find truly disgusting! He is the "Radar O'Reilly" of sports "journalism"! How can he sit inside a ballpark or football stadium full of tens of thousands of blind-drunk maniac fans going crazy, screaming, pissing and puking all over the place and say that Moss' pantomime was "disgusting"? What kind of a precious, sheltered life has this guy had, anyway?

Bill Simmons, a columnist for ESPN, categorized Buck's reaction as "Funniest Meltdown (of Wild Card Weekend)."

Seeing him gunning for an Emmy after Moss' moon had to be one of the funniest TiVo moments of all-time... Hey, remember the days when play-by-play guys were only there to provide play-by-play and set up the color guys? Then Bob Costas started doing baseball games ... within ten years, we had Buck unilaterally deciding the groundrules for moral decency during NFL games, starting a chain reaction that actually led to FOX and ESPN refusing to replay the clip that night. Since when did Buck turn into the Dad from *Footloose*? Is not he like 35? (2005)

Buck's comments also angered Vikings team owner Red McCombs so much that he demanded Fox remove Buck from calling the next Vikings playoff game against the Philadelphia Eagles the following week. McCombs insisted that Buck's opinion "suggested a prejudice that surpassed objective reporting" (Joyner). Fox Sports respectfully denied the demand.

In hindsight it seemed that stations chose not to show the replay of the celebration, not because of the celebration itself, but because of what Buck said about the celebration. Chris Collingsworth, the analyst for Buck, said with a snicker that Moss “(Shot) the moon at the fans at Green Bay.” This comment came directly before Buck started in with his “disgusting” comments.

How much differently would the celebration been viewed if Buck had reacted like Collingsworth with a hint of amusement in his voice? Would the aftermath have been the same? Would Fox and ESPN have showed the replay? We can never know, but Buck’s comments affected how the play was perceived and viewed by not only the networks, but seemingly by viewers watching at home.

The Buck/Moss incident shows how a commentator, pundit, or sportscaster can affect the way sports are viewed and perceived. It is my intention to show that the work of sportscasters, color-commentators, analysts, and pundits should be considered performance, and these television personalities considered performers. I also intend to show how these performances change based on the timeframe of the event, the past, present and future, and that the performances are perceived by networks to be needed because, through editing and broadcasting, the essential nature of the games are changed, and the performances are used by networks to engaged and amuse the audience by turning “sport” into “entertainment.”

Essence, Marketplace, and Commodities

Dick Harmon, a columnist for the *Deseret News*, wrote that college football:

Is about X's and O's, defenses and offenses, skill positions and big linemen battling in the trenches... [Its] all about effort, focus and acumen of dedicated athletes who toil, grind and labor on the practice field and on game-day Saturdays

in storied stadiums across the land to win and defeat their opponents... those bruises and blood put into that effort is rewarded with a chance at the biggest prize of all, a championship. (1)

What Harmon is describing can in some way be tied to the purest essence of sports. This essence seems to be the simple idea that athletes work their hardest on the practice field and in games to win a championship. That is it. The games are not played for fame or fortune, or for any individual awards. The goal, according to Harmon, is a team championship.

I would say there is even a more basic essence of sports. Championships are the goal, but really how many people play sports and how many win anything? And championships can be tainted and commodified so easily. It seems a more basic understanding is needed. I propose that the essence of sport is not found in winning championships, but rather found when each player plays his or her best within a set of rules. That seems to me to be the essence of sports, and seems to be the reason that we, as fans, watch. To see two teams play their best and play within the rules.

A blog “joust the facts” also explained essence in sports. The article recounted a 2006 NFL playoff game between the Denver Broncos and the New England Patriots. On a specific play in the game the Broncos cornerback Champ Bailey intercepted a pass in his own end zone and ran it back 102 yards before the Patriots tight end Ben Watson shoved him out of bounds at the Patriots’ one yard line. This was a highly improbable outcome due to Bailey’s speed, and Watson’s position on field when the interception took place. Watson’s effort to catch up and overtake Bailey was nothing short of Herculean. The article goes on to say:

The Broncos waltzed into the end zone on the next play, and the touchdown that Bailey should by all rights have scored was chalked up to running back Mike

Anderson. Denver 17, New England 6, and with the Patriots committing additional mistakes their fate was sealed. But what of Watson's play? Nothing changed. The touchdown that he prevented was scored anyway. The game that was being lost was lost anyway. Nothing changed at all. So why exert such a tremendous effort fighting against all odds to stave off the inevitable?

You do it because the ultimate reward of sport is in playing the game the way it is supposed to be played, and expending every ounce of effort and every gram of talent at your disposal in pursuit of your cause, no matter the circumstances, no matter the score... You do it because at the end, win or lose; you can look in the mirror and know that you didn't cheat yourself, or your teammates.

You do it because that, my friends, is the essence of sport. (Ergin)

Although Ergin perhaps hyperbolizes it a bit, he gives a good example for a moment where the true essence of sport was showcased. Watson's effort did not change the outcome of the game, but he played his hardest to achieve the goal of winning the game within the rules.

There are many issues and situations that seem to prevent sports from tapping into this basic essence. Harmon was actually writing, in the aforementioned article, about how frustrated he is about how commodified college football has become, especially under the rules of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) that governs who plays for the national championship. Harmon wrote in the article:

College football... is about a marketplace, which places its highest priority on the collection of money, the distribution of said coin to a chosen few, those deemed to attract it more abundantly than others. It is not about blocking, tackling, throwing and catching passes or undefeated teams. It is about a marketplace that rewards

TV ratings, geography of TV sets, media markets, traditional and historic bowl ties, bowl committees and their budgets, parades, revenue sharing, conference affiliation, pacts, contracts, pieces of paper, exchange of money and Nielsen Ratings. (2)

Harmon's point seems to be that such commodification of sports takes away from the pure essence of the game, and betrays the reason why these college athletes play.

While Harmon bemoans the troubles with college football, there are many factors that would seem to tap the essence of the sport and leave the fan and viewer with an artificial experience and a feeling of alienation, and these problems are common in all sports. From the sponsorships that seem to be more and more invasive in sporting events -- teams in Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League are stating to consider sponsorships on their uniforms, not unlike NASCAR does with its cars and drivers, to cheating by players and coaches -- Baseball has been dealing with the fallout from the rampant steroid use in the late 90's and early 2000's for years, to growing disputes between owners and players. All of these issues distract from the true essence of sports, and as a result can alienate fans. If this alienation becomes great enough, fans can go so far as to even stop watching the offending sport or team all together -- this was seen in the lack of fan interest following the cancellation of the 1994 World Series in baseball.

One aspect that might change the basic feeling for how a sport is viewed is how the event is watched, as there is a distinction between watching an event live and watching it on television. There are many pros and cons to both experiences, and yet, there is greater cultural capital, and some might argue, a better experience when an individual has attended a sporting event rather than just watching it on TV. Jim Caple on ESPN.com writes:

Sports are not just about *watching* the game; they're about being human and interacting with a community. They're about cheering and rooting and booing and making yourself heard. They're about participating...It is the same difference between watching a movie or play on TV and walking into a darkened theater and watching it with an audience, sharing and feeding off others' responses. It enhances the experience.

David Foster Wallace made this stark comparison when writing about watching Rodger Federer play tennis. "The truth is that TV tennis is to live tennis pretty much as video porn is to the felt reality of human love."

Yet, there are benefits from watching sports on TV. In a debate with Caple, Patrick Hruby argues these points for watching a broadcast: Superior instant replay, control of music being played, more comfortable seating, control of those around you, not having to pay outrageous prices for food and drinks, and being able to control what you watch and when you watch it.

Hruby makes good points, there are benefits to watching a broadcast rather than attending games, yet fans who watch sports on TV, while they can certainly enjoy the game, and can save themselves the money and effort of having to attend, can miss out on the depth of emotions and the community experience that can only be felt when watching games live. It is this gap in viewing experience that broadcasters try to fill. And one way the gap is filled is by the performance of the sportscasters.

Performance Vs. Performativity¹

Before delving into how sportscasters fill the gap made in the broadcast viewing experience, it seems beneficial to define performance, and how performance has been studied and explained in the recent past.

Rather than give a history of Performance Studies², an exercise with really no clear beginning and is far too long to devote major time to, it seems more beneficial to explain ontology of performance and performativity. Performances, as defined by Richard Schechner, who many consider the founder of performance studies, “mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories. Performances – are ‘restored behaviors,’ ‘twice-behaved behaviors,’ performed actions that people train for and rehearse” (28). He continues, “Performances exists only in actions, interactions, and relationships” (30). Schechner then lists eight ways in which performance exists, that sometimes overlap, they are:

1. In everyday life – cooking, socializing, “just living”
2. In the arts
3. In sports and other popular entertainments
4. In business
5. In technology
6. In sex
7. In ritual – sacred and secular

¹ There’s a third concept that interests me, but doesn’t really have a place in this thesis. I find the concept of performiness to be interesting. The idea behind performiness is similar to Stephen Colbert’s concept of “truthiness”. With truthiness you know the truth in your gut regardless of what facts say. It is a similar definition for performiness, in that you know and can feel when something is performance, even when it lies outside of the ontological boundaries.

² A detailed explanation of Performance Studies can be found in *Professing Performance* by Shannon Jackson.

8. In play. (31)

Schechner goes on to say, “this list does not exhaust the possibilities” (31) but rather acts as a basic guide to all things performance related. While it is helpful to see all the areas that can be considered performance, or performative, this list is, very much on purpose, very broad. Anything and everything, it seems, can be performance or performative.

Perhaps it is this extremely broad categorization of performance that has led to other scholars trying to narrow the definition down a bit. Peggy Phelan defines performance within these terms:

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.

(1993: 146)

For Phelan, performance only lives in the here and now, and in seeing the performance in person. Like in sports how there is a true essence that can be betrayed or commodified, performance too can be absorbed into a capitalist culture by being “saved, recorded or documented.” This assertion clearly marks live performance not only as the preferred, but does not classify recorded performance as performance anymore, but as “something other than performance.”

Phillip Auslander strongly differs from Phelan in this regard. He states:

All too often, such analyses take on the air of a melodrama in which virtuous live performance is threatened, encroached upon, dominated and contaminated by its insidious Other, with which it is locked in a life-and-death struggle. From this point of view, once live performance succumbs to mediatization, it loses its ontological integrity. (41-42)

Auslander posits that live performance has over time become mediatized and media like. He also points out that live performances are not completely free of mass production and capitalism -- noting specifically Broadway performances, and overtly capitalistic productions such as *Tony 'N' Tina's Wedding*.

What is interesting about Auslander's argument is instead of arguing why mediatized performance is valid, he seems to argue more about why Phelan's argument is not valid, or how television broadcasting is like Phelan's definition of performance, using this quote by Sean Cubitt:

The broadcast flow is... vanishing, a constant disappearing of what has just been shown. The electron builds up two images of each frame shown, the lines interlacing to form a "complete" picture. Yet not only is the sensation of movement on screen an optical illusion brought about by the rapid succession of frames: each frame is itself radically incomplete, the line before always fading away, the first scan of the frame all but gone, even from the retina, before the second interlacing scan is complete...TV's presence to the viewer is subject to constant flux: it is only intermittently "present" as a kind of writing on the glass...caught in a dialectic of constant becoming and constant fading. (Cubitt 30 – 31. Quoted by Auslander 43)

Auslander quickly follows that quote with “disappearance may be even more fundamental to television than it is to live performance – the television image is always simultaneously coming into being and vanishing; there is no point at which it is fully present” (44).

A seeming problem with Auslander’s argument, although it seems to be trying to give mediatized performance validity, is the fact that in arguing against Phelan’s statements, he does not quite argue why mediatized performance *should* be considered performance. Rather, he seems to assume that mediatized performance is already believed to be performance by the readers, and therefore, he chooses to poke holes in other arguments that differ from his own.

Another issue with Auslander’s argument is that, instead of seeking to level the playing field, or rather to include mediatized performance into the ontology of performance, he seems to want instead to establish mediatized performance as preferable, or dominant to live performance. As early as the first paragraph of his introduction he writes:

The Prospectus for a conference entitled “Why Theater: Choices for the New Century” posed a question that goes straight to the heart of the matter that concerns me here: ‘Theater and media: rivals or partners?’ My own answer to this question is unequivocal: at the level of cultural economy, theater (and live performance generally) and the mass media are rivals, not partners. Neither are they equal rivals: it is absolutely clear that our current cultural formation is saturated with and dominated by, mass media representations in general, and television in particular. (1)

Auslander also dismisses ideas of importance or preference of live versus the meditated performance saying that live is usually preferred by “clichés and mystifications concerning aura,

presence, and “the magic of live theater” (55). He then finds ways to argue against even these, as he calls them, “clichés.”

Auslander’s arguments seem to dismiss any preference of live to the mediatized, which, as anyone who has experienced a live performance that has affected or moved them, it seems to perhaps make his argument not as valid, as there are no exceptions made for a preferable live performance whatsoever. Phelan made a valid point for the live when she stated:

For me, live performance remains an interesting art form because it contains the possibility of both the actor and the spectator becoming transformed during the event’s unfolding... In live performance, the potential for the event to be transformed by those participating in it makes it more exciting to me – this is precisely where the ‘liveness’ of live performance matters... this potential, this seductive promise of possibility of mutual transformation is extraordinarily important because this is the point where the aesthetic joins the ethical. (2003: 5)

And yet, Auslander makes good points for the validity of a mediated performance, and how, just because it is mediatized it should not be thought lesser or ‘contaminated’. With live performance so closely resembling mediatized performance why should such differentiations be made? Two examples that hopefully will help clarify and bring validity to both arguments.

At a taping of *The Late Show with David Letterman* in 2003 my wife and I went through the various motions of obtaining tickets to see the show live. After being screened by several different people we, for some reason or the other, were given an orange sticker that, we were told, entitled us to “good seats.” Having this sticker obligated us to be in line earlier, and stand with a different, “preferred” group of people to be closer to the stage. We were delighted to be

seated in the third row right in the middle, a spot that would surely give us a great view of the show.

To our disappointment, Dave was completely hidden from our view, regardless of where he was on stage because of the camera crew and equipment surrounding him at all times. Our “preferred seats” gave us no better view of the performance or guests, and we, like everyone else in the theater, watched on one of the many, many monitors around the stage.

This example shows that the performance of the *Late Show* is intended for a television audience. Seeing the show live, other than it taking a few hours out of our afternoon, was in all reality no different than watching it on TV in another location. The performance of the show was geared towards the audience watching on TV.

Compare that to a performance where a mediatized version would fall short of the experience of a live participant. In watching Beck, a musician, at a rock concert in 2002 it was quite remarkable how there was interplay between him and the audience. How he at one point changed the song order that they had previously set based on how he felt, and later he stopped what he was doing, went to the front of the stage, and grabbed a camera from someone, gave it to the person’s friend, and posed for a picture with the person. After posing he got up to return to the song, stopped and said to the person “Hey, you cannot take pictures in here.” The entire exchange was thoroughly enjoyed by all in attendance. Watching a broadcast of this concert could never fully replicate the experience of being there in person.

So there clearly are times when a live performance is valid and preferable to a mediatized one, and in other instances where mediatized would be preferred to the live. It seems helpful to attempt to view these performances for what they are, and what they are trying to be rather than to marginalize them because they are the “Other”.

It is this “Other” that is often viewed “as performance.” It is argued by some that there is “performativity” to these happenings, meaning you can analyze and look at these things “as performance” because they are not, in fact performance. In the world of broadcast sports, the sportscasters, pundits, analysts, and color-commentators would not be considered, by some, to be performers, but what they do could be viewed *as* performance. This appraisal would render these broadcasts as the “something other than performance” that Phelan wrote about, but showing sports broadcasts out of the realm of performance and rather viewing the “performativity” of them overlooks several factors.

To start, these broadcasts fit into several categories listed by Schechner. They certainly have rehearsals, albeit they differ from typical stage rehearsals, those involved have been trained for the program, whether on the field or in the classroom, and certainly all the participants tell stories. It seems that the personas that are taken on by the sportscasters could render their behavior as “restored” and “twice-behaved.” Given the amount of games produced, and how each commentator follows a template based on the time frame of the game (past, present or future) it seems there could be a behavior that is many-many times re-behaved, perhaps like traditional *commedia dell arte*, where the characters and scenarios would be the same, but the actual things said depend on situations that the performers are faced with.

So to fully understand and comprehend the impact of these sportscasters, how they affect the viewer and the essence of sport, it seems we should not view what they do as “performative” but rather as performance. By not seeing these workers as performers we risk missing how they sometimes help commodify sports, how they interact with an audience in both good and bad ways, and how they sometimes turn sports into entertainment, which it seems they can do. For this thesis I will be viewing all sports broadcasters as performers. My purpose in doing this is not

to decry sports that are broadcast, an area of life that I quite enjoy, but rather point out how sports are manipulated by the media. These manipulations can be very entertaining, and rewarding for viewers, yet, it seems important for viewers to understand how broadcasting changes sports.

For this study I will be observing primarily *SportsCenter*, some nationally broadcast sports programs that are very similar to *SportsCenter*, and major network broadcasts of primarily the NFL and NBA. The scope of the this study will focus mainly on the four sports that seem to be the most visible in the United States at this time, which are Football, Basketball, Baseball, and Hockey.³

Past, Present and Future

This thesis will proceed as follows: In chapter 2 I will begin investigating how sports performers interpret and present images of games that have already happened. I will apply Guy Dubord's *Society of Spectacle* and Theodor Adorno's "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." Shrinking a sporting event into a few minute-long segments takes away the essence of the event, and commentators perform over highlights in order to fill the gaps of the fetishization. I will be investigating how they do this.

Chapter 3 will build on the idea that sports as seen on TV is different than sports watched live at an event, an idea that will involve Victor Turner's idea of "Communitas" from the book *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, and the concept of "idle talk" from Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. I will show how performers seek to keep audience attention by turning the game into a narrative.

³ There seems to be a wealth of research possibilities outside of these sports when it comes to how sportscasters perform over them, including the Summer and Winter Olympics, World Cup coverage as it relates to cultural identity, and high school and youth sports within respective communities.

Chapter 4 will deal with how the future is handled on sports shows. The performance of telling the future is very prevalent in sports pundit performance. I will show and explain how sports programs that deal with future sporting events seem mainly to pacify the audience and fill them full of information that sometimes is not grounded. I will be using mainly Debord and Heidegger to show how these prognostications are meant to inform the audience, which is sometimes the case. Other times they just fill time with useless information.

Chapter 2

On the Fetish-Character in Sports Programming and the Regression of Watching: How Sports Programs Perform the Past.

“In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system”
Guy Debord

It seems the best place to start when discussing performance in sports broadcasting is with the performance of events that have already happened. Shows like SportsCenter and networks like ESPN are driven primarily by recapping events that have already taken place.

Before explaining how sports programs perform past games and events, it seems useful to define and expound upon concepts I will be using to define and explain these programs.

Guy Debord in his seminal work The Society of Spectacle explains:

All that was once directly lived has become mere representation...the spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. Being isolated – and precisely for that reason – this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation. The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. (# 1, 3-4)

Debord describes how the “spectacles” or images, while they appear to unite people, in all reality alienate and separate, that images that consistently flash in front of us – namely “news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment” (#6) – keep us from actually living life, and give us, instead, a representation of living.

Douglas Kellner, who also used Debord’s ideas to analyze sports, defined spectacle as:

A tool of pacification and depoliticization; it is a ‘permanent opium war’ (Debord #44) which stupefies social subjects and distracts them from the urgent task of real life – recovering the full range of their human powers through creative praxis. The concept of spectacle is integrally connected to the concept of separation and passivity, for in passively consuming spectacles, one is separated from actively producing one’s life. (39)

So in this way consuming spectacles is a form of what Marx referred to as “commodity fetishism,” (Chp 1 Section 4) in that instead of seeing all the work and labor that went into a commodity we only see the thing before us. With spectacles we no longer live life, we merely watch it. Watching has become living.

Adorno used this notion of commodity fetishism to express an issue he saw in how people listened to music. “The isolated moments of enjoyment prove incompatible with the immanent constitution of the work of art, and whatever in the work goes beyond them to an essential perception is sacrificed to them” (291). He also states, “The familiarity of a piece is a surrogate for the quality ascribed to it. To like it is almost the same thing as to recognize it” (288). Adorno is writing about how music is often shrunken down to the most listenable parts, and often times whole movements and musical pieces were overlooked in favor of short listenable segments. To Adorno, the regression of listening showed that music was losing the intellectual component, that he appreciated, and was becoming more about concert attendance or knowing a particular song. The act of listening being replaced by mundane issues that surround music and music losing most, if not all, of its value. This same idea of commodity fetishism is also very apparent in the area of sports broadcasting.

Just about any television program that deals directly with recounting past sporting events has to shrink the entire event, and in most cases many events, down to anywhere from a few minutes to, in some cases, merely seconds of footage. These segments are put together in many ways to try to give the sequence interest, or at least give continuity to the events. Mostly, the highlights either revolve around the exciting moments of the game, or if the contest was less than exciting, at least give a few glimpses of a prominent or popular player. Like what Adorno says about the fetishism involved with listening to only the most listenable parts of music, this shrinking down of events causes a regression of watching in the viewer. No longer are the nuances, strategies, and role players seen and appreciated, but now only the splashy dunks, home runs, and touchdown passes are shown. The games become a mash up of excitement and adrenaline, all style with no substance.

The images cannot be left alone in this condition. A need is made or generated for the audience members, as it is not easy to distinguish what is being presented without context and orientation in order to make sense of the images being displayed. Watching *SportsCenter* with no sound is completely disorienting in that the images and plays flash before us completely unfettered by explanation or background. Presenting the highlights in this way would alienate audience members, and would generate very little interest in what is being presented.

With the images cut with many quick edits, and the game being fetishized to only the “exciting” parts, the fundamental nature of the game is lost. Instead of witnessing or experiencing two teams giving their all for winning a contest, we are left with a mere glimpse of what occurred. For these highlights to carry any weight or interest they must be made interesting by other means, namely the performance of the sportscasters.

It is this performance that brings the intended continuity and meaning to the images being broadcast, but almost more importantly, this performance brings humor to the images, as the sportscasters do not just tell what is happening in a highlight clip, but comment on it as well, in both analytic and comedic ways. In order to make a viewer pay attention to something that has already taken place, networks use performers to keep you interested and plugged in, and while broadcast companies cannot replicate the essence of sports, they are very effective at presenting a spectacle that turns sport into entertainment, which can be very fun but, as I will explain, can also be problematic.

In true anchorman/woman form the first priority over any string of highlights is typically to give context and information to what is being shown: Who has the ball, what they do, and statistics that attempt to give meaning to what has happened. The next priority is to bring some sort of analysis or commentary to what is being shown and lastly, and some would say most importantly, is to bring humor and fun to the images. To unpack this a bit, I am going to focus on these three functions individually.

Just the Facts?

The Anchor first and foremost gives details about what is being shown, not just who has the ball, but also some background information that typically goes along with what is about to be shown, or what has just been shown. If a player is about to hit a homerun, the highlight is often prefaced by how many homeruns he has hit, or how many hits she has off of a particular pitcher. In football sometimes the information deals with how many yards the running back averages per carry, or how efficient the quarterback is in third-down situations. These statistical breakdowns are intended to give preface or closure to the highlight that is about to roll or the one that is just been shown, whether to juxtapose the occurrence or to support the image. The following

examples were taken from the 9 June 2009 West Coast broadcast of *SportsCenter*. This broadcast is interesting in that the NBA finals, Stanley Cup finals, and Major League Baseball regular season were all being played that night.

The program started off with a very brief fourteen-second recapping of the Stanley Cup finals game, showing a very exciting sequence where a defenseman Rob Scuderi made three straight saves in the last minute of the game, and we learn that the Pittsburgh Penguins won game six 2-1 over the Detroit Red Wings.

Following those brief highlights, the anchormen, Stan Verrett and Neil Everett, set up game 3 of the NBA finals, in which the Orlando Magic had trailed the Los Angeles Lakers zero games to two, by stating, “No team has ever come back to win an NBA playoff series after losing the first three games, there is no magic in that fact, so was there magic in Orlando Tuesday? Fellas?” The broadcast then cut to Amway Arena in Orlando, where Stewart Scott, Michael Wilbon, Jon Berry and Ervin ‘Magic’ Johnson were covering the NBA finals for ABC/ESPN. Right before the highlights began Scott declared, “the Magic had never won an NBA finals game, that was their first ever, game three Tuesday night, it finally worked.”

ESPN then showed a very short clip of Gina Marie Incanoela singing the national anthem, with the caption, “Magic 6 – 0 when she sings the national anthem,” a point brought up by Scott after the clip.

Immediately following the singing, Scott stated, “Rafer Alston was 1- 13 from the field since the first half of game one,” followed by Alston hitting three different shots. Later after a barrage of shots go in by the Magic it is pointed out that they made seventy-five percent of their shots in the first half, to which Scott exclaims, “That’s an NBA record!”

Later in the segment Kobe Bryant is shown missing an important free throw late in the game, Johnson erupted, speaking of Bryant, “The greatest closer in the game today, MISSED the free throw!” to which Scott added, “He missed two free throws in the first two games combined, he missed five in game three.”

To finish the segment, Scott added, “Here’s another thing about Pau Gasol and Lamar Odom, they both gotta rebound a lot better, As for the Los Angeles Lakers, this was their seventh straight NBA finals loss on the road, that ties an NBA record originally set by the Ft. Wayne Pistons back in 1955 and 1956. ”

Within these ten minutes facts and stats are explained and given at a lightning fast pace. Never at any time are actual “facts” differentiated from opinions of the sportscasters.

Postructural theorist Roland Barthes, when commenting on the intricacies of how history is written, states, “Historical fact is linguistically linked to a privilege of being” (135). Barthes seems to be saying that facts are assigned by those who are privileged enough to be writing the histories, and the facts they find important are the ones that are brought to our view.

SportsCenter points out the facts that they find important, and leaves out any facts that are seemingly insignificant. But are all the facts pointed out really significant? Barthes questions, “Is everything in narrative significant, and if not if insignificant stretches subsist in the narrative syntagm, what is ultimately, so to speak, the significance of this insignificance?” (143).

There seems to be much insignificance in the performance of recapping Game 3, especially in the area of statistics are concerned; for example, the clip of a little girl, Incanoela, singing the national anthem. Why show that? Why point out that the Magic are 6 – 0 when she sings before games? How is that relevant? This is only significant in that the Magic won the game, but is it even then? It seems like placing this clip before the rest of the highlights gives

some sort of credence to the magical ability that this girl has on affecting the outcome of games. If we toss this aside as a triviality thrown in for amusement it is difficult to tell which statistics are valid and meaningful, and which are presented as merely entertaining. Perhaps all statistics are just entertainment.

Obviously most sports shows, like *SportsCenter*, take statistics very seriously. Much was made about the Magic shooting seventy-five percent in the first half and sixty-two percent the entire game as both being NBA finals records, but not much was said that they only led by five at the half and only won by four. The fact that they played so well offensively, and yet won by such a small margin would seem to say that they are outmatched in this series, and even when they play remarkably well, like they did in game 3, they can barely win. These points were never made, instead it is pointed out that the Lakers need to rebound better, a statement that was probably more opinion than anything, and that the Lakers, apparently, cannot win on the road in the finals. It seems the anchors and experts want to create anticipation for upcoming games by making the clear favorite seem vulnerable, because if there is a question as to who will win future games, there will be more interest from viewers watching.

Another issue about stats is the fact that some quantitative statements have no way of actually being determined or measured. When Johnson stated that Kobe Bryant was “the greatest closer in the game,” it was made as a statement of fact even though it was an opinion. This was followed by a line of stats about his free throw shooting, which were recorded facts, yet there was no differentiation as to which was fact, and which was opinion.

But, again, it would seem that such differentiations are not always needed because of the nature of statistics. They are helpful to sports shows to try to understand what happened in the game, but many times the stats do not add up to what all of the athletes are trying to achieve,

which is a win for their team. William Ogburn wrote about the limitations of statistics outside of hard sciences. His statement relates to sociology and seems to fit within the realm of sports statistics. “Often in sociology observations are taken as proof, when they are only approximations to certainty” (14). So often when statistics are listed on sports programs they are positioned as proof, and are given as concrete reasons the game happened the way that it did, but in attempting to replicate the game networks position statistics in order to give a feeling of what happened within the game, but in this positioning, mixed with statements that are quantifiable and not quantifiable, the games are turned into instant entertainment by broadcast networks rather than a mere recounting of what occurred. Johnson stating that Bryant was the “best closer in the game” served the same purpose as Scott listing off Bryant’s free throw numbers, which was to make watching the highlights entertaining. To illustrate how statistics do or do not tell the entire story of a game here are two examples from the NFL:

Aaron Rodgers: (1 November 2009 vs. Minnesota) Comp. 26, Attempts. 41,
Passing Yards 287, Completion Pct. 63.4 TD 3, INT 0, Passer Rating 108.5.

Derek Andersen: (11 October 2009 vs. Buffalo) Comp. 2, Attempts 17, Passing
Yards 23, Completion Pct. 11.8, TD 0, INT 1, Passer Rating 15.1

There are two things that should be noted about these stat lines: obviously Rodgers has better stats, and therefore, one could say, is a better quarterback, but the fact about these two games is that Rodger’s team lost and Andersen’s won.

Bill Simmons makes a case that stats do not tell the whole story in this way, he specifically is talking about basketball, but there are connections in many sports:

“Numbers help [evaluate players and teams] but only to a certain degree. You still have to watch the games... We measure players by numbers, only the playoffs

roll around and teams that play together, kill themselves defensively, sacrifice personal success and ignore statistics invariably win the title.” (2009: 46)

With *SportsCenter* there is a true devotion to statistics, that they help tell the “true” story as to how the game happened and why it happened that way, but what we get instead is merely a *perspective* of why it happened that way. The “facts” used on *SportsCenter* perhaps tells us more about *SportsCenter*’s “privilege of being”; the fact that they control the images and the information, then it does about the sporting event being recounted. When Simmons says, “you have to watch the games” it means, to him, that sports cannot be understood from highlights and statistics alone, that the games must be watched for the game to be understood.

Which brings us back to Debord. The separation that occurs from watching highlights and hearing statistics helps us feel like we know what happened in the game, but in reality we have only been given a representation of what has happened. Instead of learning and experiencing the sport for ourselves we have been given a performance based on the images flashing in front of us. The mode the audience has chosen to unite them with the game has in fact presented a representation that can have an alienating effect. In chapter three I will discuss more about experiencing games in person contrasted with watching them on TV.

Analysts, Experts, and Monuments

The second duty of the sportscaster is to give some insight to the game or play, and to explain how or why things happened the way that they did. Often though these duties are left to some sort of expert who joins the anchor for or after the highlights. There are a few different set-ups and scenarios for various anchors and experts to be teamed together and with each other. Below I will list off different configurations and the relevance and significance of such pairings.

It seems, and will be shown below, that the more “important” the sporting event, the more personnel assigned to that event.

Most highlights that are presented on *SportsCenter* are given with two sportscasters who both function more as anchormen than analysts. Usually one will perform over the highlights being shown, except when the second laughs, or makes a brief funny comment on what is being shown, typically though, the anchor who is performing gives his own statistics and information about the clip, and will make typically very few analytical comments. If they do, they are very quick, and sound more like a fan’s reaction to what is happened rather than an informed expert breaking down a play. Scott’s comment on how the Lakers “gotta rebound a lot better” is a fine example of this. Another example: On 9 November 2009, the SportsCenter “Highlight of the Night” was a Syracuse vs. Albany college basketball game. Syracuse, being the college basketball powerhouse that it is, walloped Albany 75 - 43. Steve Levy was performing over the highlights. He stated that Albany missed a three point shot, and then added, “They missed an awful lot.” Later in the segment one of the Syracuse players got hurt and had to leave the game, to which Leavy responded, “they wouldn’t need him” because of Syracuse’s complete dominance.

These examples are typical for analysis given by an anchor performing over highlights. The analysis is really just opinions on the game given from a novice point of view that is stated quickly⁴. It mirrors what fans that watched the game might say about a particular game or play, and doesn’t really give insight, as much as it gives the fans a feeling that these performers are like them, and watch games in a similar way.

⁴ While anchors are given very few chances to make analytical comments, it seems they might know more about the subject than the experts do.

This configuration is the status quo of *SportsCenter*, and while some games are given longer segments than others, if a game is presented with only the two anchors it is known to the audience that the game is “normal” or there is nothing special about that particular happening. As an audience we can tell when an event or sport is more “special” with the addition of an expert.

Experts, or analysts, often make appearances on sport highlight programs to offer insights and give their opinions as to what happened in the game. In some situations this expert will give analysis as the highlights are being shown, in other instances the original highlights have been shown and now an anchor will act like a talk show host and ask the expert a few questions, and the expert expounds about the whys and hows of the game. Some examples:

On 12 November 2009 the Chicago Bears played the San Francisco 49ers in a Thursday evening game and lost 10 – 6. The Bears quarterback, Jay Cutler threw five interceptions, one as time expired in the end zone. After showing highlights of the game, in a separate segment sportscaster John Anderson interviewed analyst Mark Schlereth about the game. After introducing Schlereth, Andersen’s first question was “(after this loss) where are the Bears?” to which Schlereth responded:

Well, I mean, the Bears, you know, you coming into this season, you looked at them, there was a lot of different issues. Number one Jay Cutler has a propensity to throw a lot of picks (Andersen agrees by going Mm-hmm). I mean, he has a lot of faith in his athletic ability, and he’s a supremely gifted athlete, supremely gifted quarterback, but often times he takes way too many chances...especially late down the middle of the field, and you always hear people talk about it. You cannot be late down the middle of the field ‘cause bad things are going to happen to you as a quarterback, but you look at this offense in general, Offensive line has

struggled, they've got some weak issues there on that offense line, they've turned around that uh...uh... they've turned around different players on that offensive line, wide receivers, Devin Hester is your number one receiver he is still very raw, he's still very green at very...wide receiver position, they do not have a lot of help around Jay Cutler, so, you know, part and parcel of trying to groom a quarterback and and and... create an intelligent quarterback (Andersen Mm-hmms again) is having the people around him so that he doesn't have to take those chances, and ultimately he does, he has to throw it around, he just has to be better at making decisions, when to throw it away, and when to get out of a bad play.

This exchange makes me wonder what exactly is he talking about, and what is the point he is making? While the question "where are the Bears?" is vague enough to basically let him say whatever he wants about their team, the information he gives-- Jay Cutler throws a lot of interceptions, needs help in the offense, and he needs to make better decisions -- seem to be fairly pedestrian at best. Schlereth played in the NFL for twelve seasons as a guard, and undoubtedly knows a lot about football, but it seems like even a casual fan that watched the game could have given this answer. His expertise in football, and as an offensive lineman specifically, does not seem to be needed to answer, "where are the Bears?"

This exchange seems to point out that in order to make any critical comments about a team or a player on *SportsCenter* you need to be an "expert" or an "analyst" of some kind, whereas the anchors sometimes make snide comments -- which will be discussed in a moment -- or very brief statements of opinion, like has been mentioned, but seem to be forbidden to make real critical comments. What specifically entitles someone to be analyst or an expert? It seems that the definition is filled by either 1) sportswriters, or people who started in print journalism

and made the jump to ESPN, like John Clayton or 2) former players. So, either people who have played before or are current players, or people who have access to people who play currently.

This shows a devotion to analysts who have had some contact with the game itself. They have to have the experience, or have close contact with those with experience to be able to comment on games, yet, the analysis more often than not is no more informed or interesting than comments a casual fan would make. The fact that Jay Cutler “throws a lot of picks” is a statement so obvious that a child could make it, yet there is Mark Schlereth explaining Cutler’s rashness as a weakness of the Bears.

Yet these moments of analysis, like Schlereth’s example, have a stupefying effect on the viewer. I watched the chat with he and Andersen and did not notice how mundane it was of it until I listened through it a few times. Because I have watched these programs so often, and really I do watch a lot, the banter between these two seemed normal, and I watched without really listening. Debord talks about this when he states:

The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: “everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear.” The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances. (#12)

We accept these comments as valid because they are presented to us. ESPN has taken time to ask this person’s opinion, and he apparently knows what he is taking about, and the audience largely accepts this. Yet, with even a second listen to the comments the lack of anything interesting being said is very clear. The expert has not really taught us anything about the game, or the sport in general.

Another way in which the one-anchor/one expert teams work is during selected highlight an expert will team up with a sportscaster to perform the highlights. This happened during the 6 June 2009 *SportsCenter* when Steve Levy was joined by hockey analyst Mathew Barnaby to perform over the highlights of Game 5 of the Stanley Cup finals between the Penguins and the Red Wings. In these instances the sportscaster (Levy) provided play by play on the highlights, and the analyst (Barnaby) provides insight as to what is being shown. Levy would set up the play, and tell what happened, and Barnaby would explain how it happened. Much like the announcer/analyst dynamic which will be covered in chapter 3. Here is how one interchange played out, showing how a goal was scored by Detroit:

Levy: Here's Chris Osgood, he would get an assist on this play, to Marian Hossa, to Valtteri Filppula [who scored a goal].

Barnaby: Notice that backhand sauce. Up over Eaton, to Filppula who goes in, that's just some sweet marinara.

It is interesting to note, that Levy's comments would be presented with the play being shown at normal speed, while Barnaby's analysis would accompany a slow motion of what was just presented.

This particular arrangement yielded an interesting outcome. For these highlights Levy was fairly straightforward in his performance, and Barnaby told the jokes. In addition to the "Sweet Marinara" line, he added a line after a goal was scored "top shelf, where momma hides the cookies."

This was an interesting presentation. Where a lot of the time the sportscaster provides humor and color to a broadcast, this instance the analyst provided most of the jokes, and well as the analysis.

In both of these circumstances an expert was provided in order to give a sporting event extra validity. The Bears-49ers game was a Thursday night NFL game, and typically the NFL was thought to be the most popular sport and therefore given more coverage. Levy was teamed with Barnaby for the Stanley Cup Finals in hockey. Having an expert come on for a segment sets the sporting event above the others. In fact, it seems that the more validity ESPN wishes to give an event the more experts it will place to cover that event.

This leads to the three experts, one anchor set up that covered the 2009 NBA finals. This set up, while it seems a bit overkill, is typical for special event games, such as the Super Bowl, the World Series and the NBA finals.

On ESPN when highlights are being shown with this set up, the anchor acts as the talk show host, leading the performance of the events by explaining the images being shown, and then referring to the others when needed. Stuart Scott acted as the anchor in our above mentioned finals clip. He would narrate the events and when an opinion, or an analysis was needed he would direct the conversation to someone else with a question such as, “JB, we talked about Dwight Howard Defensively, what’d you think about his offensive game early?” or, “Magic, what does this guy (talking about Trevor Ariza) do for the Lakers team” And those analysts would take over. All of the interactions timed meticulously to correspond to images being shown of the game.

These interactions seem much more scripted and clean than some segments on *SportsCenter*. The way Scott shot questions at the experts, and how they answered with carefully worded information. This was much different than Mark Schreleth rambling about the Bears offensive issues, and even a bit cleaner than the Levy-Barnaby exchanges, with many more jokes and much more detail given to the game. Time was taken to prepare comments, and time them

with the highlights. Gleam and gloss are important for event games to give them extra importance.

Michel Foucault made an interesting point while writing about how history is treated. He states that in the past history undertook to memorize monuments and transform them into documents. He then states that:

In our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities. (7)

So rather than trying to remember a monument, history now creates them. This is seemingly very apparent with how sporting events are handled. ESPN and other networks make monuments of some events, and molehills of others. I will take a close look at the two games I have already mentioned above, that were both featured on the 9 June 2009 evening edition of *SportsCenter*. Game three of the NBA finals and game six of the Stanley Cup finals⁵.

Both games were covered at the game sites by anchors and experts, but that is just about where the similarities end. While the NBA is given three experts, the NHL is given one. The NBA highlights and analysis take up the first ten minutes of the show, and Finals related segments are, later in the show, given seven minutes. The NHL, on the other hand, was given

⁵ A good article about ESPN's seeming conflict of interest with their televised events, which they've paid to televise, and their "news" coverage is entitled "At ESPN, conflict of interest is business as usual" by the then Ombudsman Le Anne Schrelber. In the article Schrelber writes about the priorities set on football, which is perceived to be the most popular sport, but I think the comments also work well with priorities set on any sport. She writes: "*Sportscenter* is...supposed to be news-driven, which means the actuality of the day or week takes precedence over the maybe of next fall. On some days, hockey is bigger news than football. It would be refreshing to see it played that way, if only just once, if only to reclaim a bit of that pre-Disney innocence."

five minutes after the NBA highlights, and another two minutes later. The NBA commentators had their own set that overlooked the court at Amway Arena. The NHL segments were filmed in front of a blue backdrop that read “Stanley Cup Championships” and “NHL.com”. We assume the anchor and expert were at the site, but frankly they could have put up a backdrop just about anywhere. Another wrinkle, before game 7 of the Stanley Cup finals ESPN added Barry Melrose, a second expert, to the broadcast team, hence, the second expert giving a game 7 a bit more validity.

It is both confusing and not-confusing as to why the NBA is given such preferential treatment by ESPN. For one it is perceived that more people like basketball than hockey. It is also believed that the stars of Basketball are more widely known, and more widely appreciated.

But there are a number of factors that make shoving the Stanley Cup finals in the corner a bit confusing. The Stanley Cup Finals game that evening could potentially clinch the series for the Red Wings if they had won. The two teams were arguably the most popular in the sport at the time, with some of the games most known stars -- Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin for the Penguins, Nicklas Lidstrom, Pavel Datsyuk and Henrik Zetterberg for the Red Wings just to name a few -- playing. It could be argued that the Stanley Cup match up was more compelling than the NBA match up, with two series clinching games going down to the wire, and frankly it seems that the Stanley Cup might have made for better TV than the NBA Finals did. Especially when you consider that the match up that was most desirable for TV, LeBron James's Cleveland Cavaliers against Kobe Bryant's Los Angeles Lakers, died when Orlando defeated Cleveland in the conference championship.

In a nutshell, the NHL games were seemingly closer matched, and more exciting, and ultimately they culminated in a seven game series. The NBA finals games were a tiny bit

predictable. As I have said earlier, on June 9th the Magic played a nearly flawless game, and still just barely eeked out a victory. Two games -- games 2 and 4-- went into overtime and were exciting, but games 1 and 5 were blowout wins for the Lakers. It would seem fairly clear that the Lakers were in full control of the series.

It is no coincidence that NBA finals games were and are broadcast on ABC, which along with ESPN is owned by Disney. It is clear that ESPN is telling us which of these games is more important by the number of experts they use, to the glamour of their set, to the time they give each sport. The monument they have made to the NBA not only steers our gaze towards the sport that makes them advertising money, but also directs us away from a sport that is covered by another network.

By giving lots of different looks and set ups of sportscasters and analysts *SportsCenter* is able: 1) to show which games are more important than others, 2) to give validity to any event and to their coverage of that event with “expert” analysis, and set up which events are most important depending on how many experts are there, and 3) to keep the show interesting by changing things up. We are given different voices to different segments, which breaks the potential monotony. With anchors and analysts performing over the highlights we are supposed to have real sense of what happened in the game, but this is not enough to keep people watching and interested in the broadcast. There has to be humor as well.

Everyone’s a Comedian...sort of.

There seems to be a need in any sports highlight show for the performers to have a certain amount of spunk or personality as they perform over highlights. The television show *The Simpsons* described this force of personality as being “Zazz, zing, zork, kapowsa. Call it what you want, in any language it spells mazooma in the bank” (Doyle). While *The Simpsons* is

obviously satirizing news and sports personalities with a ridiculous assortment of words, the message clearly portrays how these performers typically are. The pizzazz and personality they have mean “mazooma” in the bank for their companies and sponsors.

Bringing humor to a performance shows that the video segments and the commentary and analysis by the sportscasters is not enough. Humor is needed and intended to keep an audience watching. Make no mistake; while these performers make comments that are supposed to be funny, many times they are far from actually achieving laughter. The performers more use slang, sarcasm, word play and zaniness in order to make sports highlights “fun” to watch. I will also explain how, with the use of catchphrases, *SportsCenter* has created a vocabulary for sports fans.

Stuart Scott is a fine example of a sportscaster that uses slang and “street” talk to connect with an audience. While performing over highlights of game three of the 2009 NBA finals, he remarked, as Kobe Bryant shot a three pointer in reaction to a three that was just made by the Orlando Magic, “you got threes? Yo! Son! I GOT THREES!” In that same broadcast after an intricate passing sequence ended with Rafer Alston driving, as Scott put it “right down the boulevard” He then asked Magic Johnson what Alston’s nickname is, to which Johnson Bellowed “SKIP! To my LOUUUUUU!” Scott replied “Skip to my Lou, skip to the bucket.”

Through this example we see sportscasters not trying to be “funny,” but trying to be engaging through slang. Scott’s use of the terms “I got threes” and “right down the boulevard” are ways for him to position himself to a young male demographic that the broadcast company so eagerly wants the attention of, and Scott is very good at what he does, bringing a lot of enjoyment to the highlights he performs over; however, slang is not the only way to keep a young male demographic. Some other examples follow.

Neil Everett on the same broadcast (9 June 2009), over a series of Mets-Phillies highlights asks his co-anchor, Stan Verrett, which team Francisco Rodriguez pitches for, after Verrett remarks “Mets?” Everett explodes “TEAM SHUT IT DOWN!”⁶ as Rodriguez is shown striking out a Philly batter.

Other examples come from the 20 December 2009 broadcast of *Football Night In America* where Dan Patrick performed over highlights of the Packers, Steelers game. Over a highlight of a Steelers passing play “Ben Roethlisberger to Mike Wallace, not *60 Minutes*, but 60 yards! Seven – nothing Pittsburgh.”

One last example comes from the same broadcast, only this time it is Keith Olbermann performing over Eagles, 49ers highlights. A pass by the Eagles is performed “(Donovan) McNabb to Bret Celek, maximum P.I. forty-three yards. He doesn’t run fast, but he runs well.” This play set up a touchdown by the Eagles to which Olbermann commented “the touchdown capping a nine play ninety four yard drive if you’re scoring at home, or if you’re alone.”

These are all examples of how these performances, while not trying to be outright hilarious, are attempting to connect with the audience. For the Patrick quote it is making a popular culture reference. For Olbermann it is the use of almost ubiquitous smart alec-y comments. Everett’s joke border on the hokey quite frequently. All of these approaches are directed at entertaining the audience, and creating personalities for *SportsCenter* anchors, as ESPN is as good at selling anchors like Stuart Scott as they are at selling athletes like Kobe Bryant. These performances also distinguish whatever show is being watched as “hip.” Viewers - particularly, as I have mentioned, young male viewers -- are beckoned by the cool jibes and

⁶ The phrase “team shut it down” is a reoccurring gag that Everett uses, and could be considered a catch phrase, which is mentioned later in this chapter.

sarcastic quips of the performers. We want to know the outcomes of games, but we watch, and come back time and time again, to snicker at the performers.

Sports highlight shows are enormously aware of the pop culture pulse of in world in which they broadcast. These shows appeal to culturally minded viewers not only by the humor, slang and sarcasm or the anchors, but also by using catchphrases. The catchphrases include those already known to the viewers, and those created by the anchors. This use of catchphrases was satirized on the program *30 Rock* when the line “That’s a deal breaker ladies” had become popular enough from their fictional show TGS that it was used on *SportsCenter*. The show cuts to a hockey clip where an unseen sportscaster -- that sounds a lot like Keith Olbermann -- performs “Rangers on the power play, (reacting to a big hockey check by Sean Avery) OH, Avery! *That’s* a deal breaker ladies” (Weiner). The use of the phrase on *SportsCenter* was an indication, at least on *30 Rock*, that a phrase was accepted, and thought “cool” by a viewing public.

This use of cool words and catch phrases has long been used on *SportsCenter*. These catchphrases seem to beckon the audience to keep their gaze steadily fixed upon the program. Some memorable quotes over the years follow.

Chris Berman is well known for two quotes. In baseball, in between the time a hitter has hit the ball, and the time it goes over the fence he typically states “Back! Back! Back! Back! GONE!” Another Berman inspired catchphrase is in football when a player breaks off a long run for a touchdown. While the player is running Berman will bellow, “He...could...go...all...the...way!”

Stuart Scott's catchphrase "Boo-yeah" is widely known. He used it on the 9 June 2009 broadcast in this way, performing over basketball highlights, "Rashard Lewis, one of the most cold blooded three point shooters in the game (reacting to a made basket) BOO-Yeah!"

Linda Cohen would repeatedly use the line "for the love of elevation" to accompany big dunks in basketball.

And, Neil Everett's catchphrase is more how he says a line than the line itself. At the beginning of any and every *SportsCenter* broadcast after the day's highlights have been introduced as a part of the title sequence the performer will say "SportsCenter! Right Now!" Everett will say "right now" very quickly with a strained, almost distressed quality to his voice. This was reified as his catchphrase when the Jonas Brothers visited the set on 7 June 2009 each of them tried to imitate the way he says it.

These catchphrases are a way of creating and manufacturing culture and cultural relevance. We look to *SportsCenter*, and other such shows, to guide us, not only to what is going on in sports, but the proper way to talk about sports and, to some degree, the proper way to talk. We as viewers are transfixed by the broadcast and return again and again to be properly initiated in how to relate sports experiences. The catchphrases becoming signifiers to for those "in the know." "The language of the spectacle is composed of signs of the dominant organization of production – signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that organization" (Debord #7).

Interestingly enough, the need for humor in the performers shows that the highlights in and of themselves seem to be without real validity. The highlights and segments without commentary, and without humorous commentary at that, can be lifeless. To hold an audience's

attention it is not enough just to show the highlights or even to explain the highlights but also to explain them in a funny way.

The fetishization of sports and the performance over those fetishizations turns sports and sporting events into entertainment, which can be problematic. Sports are bound by rules, procedures, and uncontrollable circumstances. Marquee players and teams, when they play in the playoffs and for championships, make more revenue for leagues and business partners, but the league cannot force those match ups, or else the essence and reason we watch sports is lost. The games have to be played, and played fairly. Making entertainment a need in any sporting event can lead to fudging the rules and standards of play in order to facilitate that entertainment. Major League Baseball's steroids era of the late nineties and early 2000s is a fine example of this. In retrospect, it was common knowledge that many marquee players were using steroids, at least anecdotally, but the League did not do anything about it because business and interest was up after the disastrous strike in 1994 (Drye). The recent fallout has been catastrophic to the reputation and validity of "America's" game.

So when *SportsCenter* turns a full game into thirty to ninety second segments, segments that are very fun to watch I might add, they are in fact changing "sport" into "entertainment" which needs to be understood by the audience. We are no longer witnessing the game, but a performance over segments of that game. Highlight shows are terrific for fans that just want a sense of what happened, but are not and should not be mistaken for experiencing the game itself.

Conclusion

There are two primary performers in any sports show that perform past events, anchors and analysts, and these individuals perform over highlights. These performances include giving needed information about what is happening on the screen, giving stats and "facts" about the

game, explaining how plays and teams work, and making humorous comments. These performances are needed because as programs fetishize sports, cutting events down to highlights, and those events lose cohesion and relevance. These performances can easily turn sports into entertainment, which can be problematic. Sports highlight shows need audiences, and therefore will make their broadcasts as fun to watch as possible; however, the viewing audience needs to understand that sports is not merely entertaining. Like Adorno's take on music, the essence of the sport is lost to fetishization. And instead of experiencing these games and sports for ourselves, we get mere representations of them. The highlight has become the game.

Chapter 3 The Spectacle and The Live

“Do you believe in miracles? YES!”

Al Michaels, as the United States hockey team defeated the Soviet Union in the 1980 winter Olympics.

When watching a sporting event live there are many differences between watching the event in the stadium, field, or arena, and watching the event broadcast on television. An average fan will probably watch many more games on TV than they will see in person, and television offers many functions and technologies that live attendance does not, and yet, there seems to be elements that are lost through broadcasting. One way networks try to attract viewers is through the use of sportscasters to announce and analyze the game. These performers give the history and background information about coaches and players, recite what players are doing, react to plays, give opinions on what is occurring in the game, and infuse the game with excitement with how excited they themselves become. These sportscasters turn games into narratives with themselves acting as storytellers.

But before unpacking the various roles and duties of sportscasters as they perform over live broadcasts it seems helpful to attempt to understand the difference between live and mediatized sports viewing. I would like to compare my experiences watching sporting events live, and contrast those with the mediatized events I have witnessed. I hope by comparing the two a better understanding of what broadcast companies are after when broadcasting a game will be clear, and we can understand how sportscasters take what they are witnessing live and turn it into “exciting” television.

Fanhood and Pilgrimage

I attended two sporting events prior to writing this chapter. One was a Utah Jazz basketball game against the Orlando Magic on 10 December 2009. The other was a Kansas City

Chiefs football game against the Buffalo Bills on 13 December 2009. To give context to what I experienced at these games as a fan and a live spectator I will give a bit of backdrop to both events.

My family members have been Utah Jazz fans since my early childhood. In the 1980's we would have two tickets to over twenty games a season, I myself at a very young age attending probably four or five games a year with my dad, and perhaps two or three a year with our entire family. I grew up attending games, watching on TV, and occasionally listening on the radio in my sister's bedroom. Being a part of every game was part of our family dynamic.

As I grew older, and tickets got costlier, our attendance at games declined, but our interest did not. My Dad would get fifteen, then ten, then 8 games per year, to which I would still go to a few, but not as many as I was little. The golden age of the Jazz took place as I was finishing high school and beginning college with NBA finals appearances in 1997 and 1998. I attended two finals games, which were both gut-wrenching losses. The first was the famous Michael Jordan flu game, in which he scored thirty-eight points and led the Bulls to a key victory in the series despite being very sick with the flu, in 1997 and the second was the championship clincher for Chicago in 1998 which turned out to be Jordan's final game as a Chicago Bull.

After the golden era passed (around 2000) my Dad and I have remained fans, although the rest of my family had moved on. Now Dad goes to about four games a year --- tickets in our section have increased from about twenty dollars per seat in the mid-1980's to about one hundred and thirty per seat for the 2009-2010 season -- and takes me to two. I watch occasionally, but find out most of my information from the Internet. I have not been to a playoff game since Jordan's final game in 1998.

I attended the game against the Magic in 2009 as a fan, albeit perhaps not a die-hard anymore. I knew most of the players on both teams, and knew, mostly the people we sit by at the games. This situation and atmosphere was friendly and familiar.

The football game was the exact opposite. I did not know very much about either team, and did not have much invested in the game. I was neither a fan of the Bills or the Chiefs and while I understand most of the ins and outs of football, I really did not care much about the outcome of the game.

The reason for attending, other than for this chapter, was a friend of mine, Kirk Chambers, played at the time for the Buffalo Bills, and a group of my friends decided it was time to see him play in person. All of us were located in the western United States, and Kansas City was as far west as the Bills would come that year, so it seemed to be our best option. This represented to us a pilgrimage, and perhaps the only time that we, as his friends, would see him in play professional football in person.

There are many of these pilgrimage experiences that sports fans feel the need to take. Whether it is seeing a game at Fenway Park, watching The Masters live in Augusta, or following a beloved team through a road trip. It was this pilgrimage experience that I was after, to try to capture and understand the mystique of such events, and why seeing such events live trumps seeing them on TV.

It was not just seeing Kirk, but spending time with my friends that made this pilgrimage worth taking a part of. The *communitas*, which I will describe in a moment, felt between the nine of us, Kirk included, was very real and valuable. Victor Turner writes:

When even two people believe that they experience unity, all people are felt by those two, even if only for a flash, to be one. Feeling generalizes more readily

than thought it would seem...we thus encounter the paradox that the *experience* of *communitas* becomes *memory* of *communitas*. (47. Original emphasis)

This was felt and experience by my friends and me. The experience became memory, and for our pilgrimage, and for football fans that meet eight times a year the memory of the unity is very strong. For Chiefs fans it was strong enough to get them to come to what some would call a lousy game with a horrible team, in freezing weather. *Communitas*, once achieved, seems worth pursuing time and again.

The same can be said for the Jazz game I attended. While the Jazz play forty-one home games, as opposed to eight that a professional football team plays, there was a strong feeling of *communitas* between me, my dad, and the people we sit with. I honestly do not know or remember the names of the guys who sat in front of us, and the guy who sat by me, but we chatted, joked, made comments, cheered and booed together. I have not seen any of those people sense the game, and yet, the unity, the *communitas* we experienced is etched into my memory.

I found through these experiences that there are qualities to a live viewing experience that simply cannot be reproduced on TV or through highlight shows, but that is not to say that watching games on TV cannot be important or meaningful, but the experience of watching in person and watching on TV are very different, and it seems that the qualities that differentiate the two experiences are presence and community.

Nowhere Else To Look

The first quality that stuck me about the experience of watching sports in person was the presence of the event. By presence I am referring to the state of being surrounded by an event no matter where you look. There is also an energy that accompanies live events that cannot be transmitted across a broadcast wave. Presence is both seen and felt, both tangible and ethereal as

it is made up of actual things (the playing space, the stands and seats, the players themselves) and a feeling that accompanies the event. Most adults have concerns, responsibilities, and distractions that can sidetrack them from watching or enjoying sports on TV. The level of immersion into a game is limited by the amount of attention given to the event, and often making time for these events while viewing on TV is difficult. Outside of family, work, and other interests interfering with viewing there are issues with the apparatus of the television itself. Every commercial takes away from the experience. Many times the viewer may turn the channel, searching for something else to occupy their attention during breaks. The continuity and experience of watching is broken into pieces, making viewing, while more convenient, less dynamic.

Compare that with live attendance. Even during breaks and timeouts the presence is still there. The playing area is still in sight and energy can still be felt from players and fans. In a very corporal sense live viewing is ever present, and while cell phones threaten focus and advertisements distract, you are still immersed in the event.

Auslander would not agree with any of these notions as he stated:

My claim that live performance recapitulates mediatized representations has sometimes been challenged by the demand to know why people still want to see live performances if that is the case. This is an important question usually addressed by recourse to clichés and mystifications concerning aura, presence, the “magic of live theatre” etc. Although any attempt at a general response is bound to be flawed, the attractiveness of live performance in a mediatized culture is that, like liveness itself, the desire for live experiences is a product of mediatization.

(54 – 55)

While Auslander makes many good points about the validity of mediatized performance in his book, he overlooks any soundness in a preference to being at events live, calling any attempt to justify the live “clichés”. But I wonder if he has ever actually been to a sporting event in person, and shared the experience with someone. There is an energy present and available at live events that cannot be reproduced by broadcasting, and while there are mediatized elements at games, like the jumbo-tron, they can very easily distract from the game being played, and are not needed for a fan to be immersed in an event. Case in point, the Chiefs, Bills game featured two very bad football teams. The Chiefs were 3-9 going into the game, the Bills 4-8. Both were statistically out of the playoff chase, and the players had little more to play for other than money and the fulfillment of playing a game we assume some, if not most of them, enjoy. On TV there is no way this would hold my attention, even with a friend playing I could not make it through even a quarter without becoming distracted and bored. But being there, and feeling the energy, even from a depleted crowd -- my friends guessed that Arrowhead Stadium was about half empty -- the game was very compelling and enjoyable. The presence in the stadium, and the fact that we could participate in the game, made for an immersed viewing experience that there would be no way to duplicate over a broadcast. .

Being present at games also gave freedom to the viewer to watch whatever he or she wanted to. You can watch the player with the ball, or you can focus off of the ball on other aspects of the game. In the Bills game my friends often commented that they would watch Kirk more than they would watch anything else, and there is some truth in that for me. I enjoyed seeing Kirk execute a very nice cut block during a broken run play that I would have noticed had I not been there live.

But presence is a slippery thing. I have mentioned that sports are not and cannot always be entertaining. If either game was lopsided, or one team obviously quit and stopped trying the presence would be lost, and the game would lose viewer interest. With the basketball game the Jazz got behind early, and were playing quite poorly in the first quarter. I remember thinking that maybe watching a broadcast would have been about the same thing as being there. I felt this way until midway through the second quarter when Paul Millsap swatted a Dwight Howard lay-up to start a fast break, which led to a dunk for the Jazz on the other side. This, of course, made the crowd go crazy. We had been out of it, and that play brought life to the fans, and the fans responded giving energy back to the players. From there the Jazz whittled away at the Magic's lead, took over in the third quarter and never trailed in the game again. That one play gave the crowd a jolt of energy, and the crowd's reaction seemed to galvanize the Jazz. The interplay between audience and participants that Phelan spoke seemed to be in play. There would be no way that that moment resonates the same way for someone watching a broadcast, and the person watching a broadcast would not be able to influence the participants in that moment.⁷

It should be noted that at both events I had good -- i.e. expensive -- seats. As I mentioned above our Jazz seats at about one hundred and thirty dollars per seat, and we sit on the sixth row corner, which put us close enough to hear Carlos Boozer yell "Hey!" when he was open and "Awww! Shit!" When he mishandled and lost the ball. Our seats to the football game were not as good, but we were lower bowl about twenty rows up in the visitor's end zone. On a cold and windy day in Missouri I was glad to be in the lower bowl, protected from the wind.

⁷ It is interesting to consider, instead of the micro effect fans in the stands have on the players, the macro effect of millions of people watching them on a broadcast has on them. Karl Malone, who played for the Jazz for many years, played badly in many of the NBA finals games he participated in, and I -- for one -- think that the pressure of the millions of spectators affected his play.

There is much to be said about proximity when attending games. Certainly the presence that is seen and felt is somehow in accordance with how close a viewer is to the action. While I had experiences that were more enjoyable than watching on TV, fans in the upper levels might not have had the same experience. I attended a game where the Jazz played the Milwaukee Bucks in Salt Lake on 16 January 2010. My brother and I had what were arguably the worst seats in the Energy Solutions Arena, very back row, right behind the basket. Mix in the fact that it was a lopsided win for the Jazz where both teams played sloppy basketball, and the fact that my brother and I were basically alone on our row, and the game had really no presence for us. In this occasion watching on TV might have been better than being there, because of the multiple viewpoints the cameras bring would have been preferable to our seats, and we could have changed the channel when the game got boring.

So this presence that can be felt at live sporting events is not a sure thing, and is more likely to occur with the proximity of the viewer to the event. Because sports cannot and should not always be engaging and entertaining this quality cannot be guaranteed.

An Achieving of Communitas

Another quality that live attendance brings is the sense of community that fans share with each other. This is again blasted by Auslander when he states:

The experience of theatre (of live performance generally, I would say) provokes our desire for community but cannot satisfy that desire because performance is founded on difference, on separation and fragmentation, not unity. Live performance places us in the living presence of the performers, other human beings with whom we desire unity and can imagine achieving it, because they are there, in front of us. Yet live performance also inevitably frustrates that desire

since its very occurrence presupposes a gap between performer and spectator. Whereas mediatized performance can provide the occasion for a satisfactory experience of community *within* the audience, live performance inevitably yields a sense of the failure to achieve community *between* the audience and the performer. (57)

This maybe a true statement as far as watching a performance in a theater is concerned, but community between fans at a game, where there is talking between spectators and voices unify to cheer and boo, is much more likely than watching a mediated version with it is many distractions. The football game I attended offered another view on the community aspect of watching sports in person. We arrived quite early to the game, since none of us had been to Arrowhead before, and did not know the kind of traffic to expect. It was interesting to me the level of excitement that emanated from the fans tailgating in the parking lot. Most of them wearing their Chiefs paraphernalia, with a little Buffalo merchandise noticeable here and there. The traditions of game day were very apparent for most fans. From barbeques to beanbag games, to footballs whizzing around I could tell that many of these fans, even with a dreadful team to root for, considered the experience of tailgating and viewing the game as, what seems to be, a “holy” experience. Turner wrote about such gatherings and interactions when he wrote of *communitas*. *Communitas*, he wrote, was “an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals” (45). This relationship, Turner points out, while obliterating boundaries and differences in people, *communitas* does not take away individuality. “For me *communitas* preserves individual distinctiveness” (45).

It was clear that the Chiefs had had a few lean years talent wise, as every jersey being worn was of players who no longer played for them (Larry Johnson, Priest Holmes, even a

Brodie Croyle). But that did not stop the celebration of football that is enjoyed by the fans eight times a year from happening. The idea of *communitas* was very present. All outside influences and roles these fans play in life were replaced by their role as Chiefs fans. Their Differences were melted away in a sea of red, white and gold.

This *communitas* carried over into the stadium for the game. Most fans who tailgate together sit together, although this is not always the case. Just how there are traditions and roles outside of the stadium there are routines and customs inside as well. For many the people they sit by become friends, at least in a loose meaning of the word. I have found that the people around me at the Jazz games I have attended, while not being friends exactly, I am able to be friendly with because we have something in common, typically we are rooting for the same team. This seems to point out an oversight by Auslander when he states that there is a failure to achieve unity between performer and audience member “in live performance generally”. Audience members, at sporting events have a great chance at obtaining unity, not only with each other but also with their team in how we participate in achieving the goal of winning the game. While, like in live theater, there is separation between the performer and the audience member, the audience can participate in what is occurring in the game, and can help sway the outcome, which is often referred to as “home court advantage”. While there is physical separation, there is mental and emotional unity that is felt between players and fans, and fans do motivate and lift players in their goals.

Narrativizing The Event

So when a game is mediatized and broadcast it does not seem that the presence of the game is completely lost, but it is changed. Broadcasting distances viewers from the action, and

cuts the game into varying camera angles and pictures. While this is meant to give the broadcast excitement it also can pull viewers out of an immersed experience of viewing.

Also, as I have mentioned, the distractions outside of the apparatus and inherent in the apparatus of the television distract the viewer. Because of this distancing, and the many distractions competing for your attention, it seems that in broadcasting games performers attempt to make the game a narrative in order to keep viewer attention. In order to do this there are two vital roles of announcer and analyst (not unlike highlight shows) and these performers have rules that they stick to in order to give the audience a story to make up for the lack that broadcasting brings.

The announcer and the analyst, or analysts depending on the broadcast, first and foremost tell the story of the game. The announcer will cover a wide range of storylines, from the situation (who is on the field, how much time is left) to facts surrounding the play (how both teams are playing, player and team statistics) to giving information about what is happening (who has the ball, who is involved with the play, and what happens.) The analyst, in turn, explains the storylines. Mostly analysts comment on what is happened, either in the last play, or in the game as a whole. Very much like the anchor and expert in shows that recount past sporting events, the announcer calls out what happens during the game and acts as the talk show host to the analyst, lobbing questions his or her way to fill time. But, while most analytical comments and criticisms are saved for the analyst, the announcer gives more criticism than their anchor counterparts.

While the announcer and analyst attempt to merge the presence felt by live performance into a narrative, they often use the communitas of fans and teams as just another aspect of that narrative. “The crowd goes wild” or “they’re really coming together as a team” are phrases often stated by sportscasters as a way to tell the story of the event, but the fact that we have to be told

these things, rather than being able to just experience them for ourselves, and know they are happening, shows how broadcasting cannot quite bring the same experience that seeing the game in person brings.

The announcers and analysts have three main goals when they perform over live events. They 1) give background information to explain the story 2) give comments and opinions on plays and 3) imbue the event with enthusiasm.

Give some History

To make the event interesting announcers and analysts will often give background information and add story details to help turn a sporting event into a narrative. This is especially true for football, where there is so much down time that needs to be covered. While fans in the stadium are use to some downtime in the game, and perhaps use that time to chat with their neighbors, networks seem to be afraid of dead air, so performers need to cover all the down time. Giving background, history, and information on the coaches and players of the game. An awful lot of this info is not really about the game itself, but seems to attempt to bring a human angle to the sport being played.

This idea was displayed on 20 December 2009 when Joe Buck and Troy Aikman performed over the Green Bay Packers, Pittsburgh Steelers football game for the FOX network. The Steelers entered the game having lost their last five games a point that was pointed out many, many times in the broadcast. “I know we keep saying this” Buck stated “but they’ve lost five straight, they’ve lost seven on the season and all seven have been by less than eight points.” An explanation of the losses followed, Buck noted that the Steelers lost two leads late to “the Raiders, of all people,” later they showed a graphic which detailed, one by one, all the scores of

the five losses. Each graphic contained an image of a Pittsburgh player who looked sad, or befuddled in some way.

Another example came when the two spoke about the Packers kicker, Mason Crosby, and his recent trouble converting field goals. It was explained that he had missed relatively short field goals in the last four games, which included a thirty-three yard attempt in the game being broadcast. Buck stated, “He is not a confident kicker.” Aikman added “You work on mechanics and fundamentals and hope that carries over to the field, and your just hoping you can execute.” He continued, “it is *hard*, it is hard to block out the negatives.” Buck stepped in “That’s a long way of saying that this is a big third and one for Green Bay.”

All of this information is to bring anticipation and drama to the game. Performing in this way is meant to not only bring excitement to the viewer, but also bring some sort of relevancy to the contest. When examining closely it seems this information really does not matter to the game at hand. Certainly losing a sixth game in a row would be bad, but is it that much worse than losing five straight? Mason Crosby had missed field goals in each of the last four games, but he had made more than he missed. In those four games he was 6 for 10 on field goals, not fantastic perhaps, but also, perhaps not as dire as the performers had made it out to be. Both of these cases the performers tried to infuse a game with drama, as the sense of excitement that would be felt live needs to be pushed a bit. It seems that perhaps a lot of this dramatizing is unnecessary to the game itself and not truly formed and thought out. Martin Heidegger’s notion of idle talk may explain and give clarification to this performance. Heidegger explained that with idle talk:

The discourse communicated can be understood to a large extent without the listener coming to a being toward what is talked about in discourse so as to have a primordial understanding of it. One understands not so much the beings talked

about, but one does listen to what is spoken about as such. This is understood, what is talked about is understood, only approximately and superficially. (157)

Robert Solomon, on focusing.org, explains Heidegger's ideas of idle talk in this way:

Throughout the section on "Idle Talk" and despite his preface of not being "disparaging", he positions himself firmly from the perspective of favoring a certain type of understanding, a certain type of Being: Being whose understanding is "grounded" in one's own experience in the world. Understanding that seeks to find the primordial source; the "about" which brings one to a meaningful grasp of entities and contexts. In contrast, "Idle Talk" is posed as a "groundless" discourse concerning the topical "about" a dialogue which presumes and represents itself as understanding, yet whose "understanding" one can never call "mine", since it merely refers to and in this way hides behind the belief that someone at some point understood this, so therefore it must be true.

Heidegger also writes "Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter" (58). It would seem that these performers engage in what has been described as idle talk, or words spoken that are not "grounded" in a primordial source, but gives a sense of understanding without really doing so. We, the audience, are told stories and background that we feel gives us a real sense of the games and the players, but perhaps, just gives us an understanding that is merely superficial. We feel we know something but do not really know it.

As broadcasters take part in idle talk details and storylines that are not really important to the game become important. These human elements inserted by the performers seek to surround

the game with a narrative, and make a broadcast exciting to watch even during boring moments. The narrative keeps you from turning the channel.

“I don’t agree with that at all.”

A second important function of the announcer and analyst is to give opinions and commentary about plays and decisions made during the games. In this way the performers reify in the audience how to feel about a certain plays and the game as a whole.

During the above mentioned Steelers, Packers game (20 December 2009) the Steelers decided to attempt on onside kick with just over three minutes to go in the game while they were leading 30 -28. The Steelers recovered the kick, but the player did not allow the ball to travel ten yards, and possession was given to the Packers. This elicited interesting responses from Buck and Aikman. First, as the kick unfolded, Buck stated, “onside kick...executed to perfection!” as the Steeler player grabbed the ball and started running with it. As soon as there was any doubt if the play was executed legally the announcers both turned on it. Buck stated, “I do not get it” as to why the Steelers coach Mike Tomlin would call for the play, his confusion was shared by Aikman, “I do not understand this one at all...I do not get it on a number of levels.” Aikman was only able to explain one of the levels, why chance giving the ball to an opponent on a shortened field when you are only leading by 2 and have momentum, before he was interrupted by the game officials.

It is interesting to note how easily Buck’s performance turned from “to perfection!” to “I do not get it.” It seems the transition took under fifteen seconds. It seems that, if the onside kick have worked in the favor of the Steelers they might have applauded the gutsy call by Tomlin. The performers do not or usually will not disagree with a play that worked, or praise a decision,

even a timely one, that did not pan out. Attention gets placed based on the winner and the loser, and never outside of the moment.

Another good example of this was during the last ten seconds of game four of the Lakers, Magic NBA finals in 2009, which was broadcast by ABC on 11 June 2009. L.A. was down by 3, and inbounded the ball from their end of the floor after a timeout. The ball was passed to Kobe Bryant who tossed it to Trevor Ariza, who passed across the court to Derrick Fisher who brought it up guarded by Jameer Nelson. Fisher, more open than he probably could have/should have been drained a three, which sent the game into overtime. Nelson did not seem to think Fisher would take the shot, and was a few paces off of him when he went up.

The game was being announced by Mike Breen and analyzed by Mark Jackson and Stan Van Gundy, and after the play all of them, rather than praising Fisher for hitting a remarkable shot, tore into Nelson for not playing better defense. Van Gundy spouted, “What is Jameer Nelson thinking they’re going to do? Why wouldn’t you be up and crowd the guy? Players IQ always astounds me, of not knowing the score and situation.” Breen added, “Well, at least that point, when Fisher’s coming up, make the foul there!” Breen quickly and only momentarily shifts focus to Fisher’s amazing shot, “meanwhile Fisher, another clutch three-pointer, he’s had so many in his career.” But Breen quickly focused back on Nelson when he stated, “there’s nothing to defend beyond the three point line in that situation.”

Like the football crew did with Mike Tomlin’s decision to attempt an onside kick, the announcers fixed their gaze on one aspect of a situation, and overlooked others. The fact that they place so much emphasis on Nelson seems to portray that he is the reason Fisher made the shot, when in reality Fisher, who as Breen gushed had done that very thing “so often in his

career”, could have made the shot even with Nelson guarding him closely. If Fisher misses the shot Nelson’s defense would never come into the picture.

The Louder the Better

The third aspect that I would like to cover about the performance of live games is the fact that the announcer has to make the game exciting by his or her performance. Because of the distancing effect broadcasting has on games the excitement of a big play cannot be felt, or sometimes even seen by a viewer. The performers must not only tell the viewer what is going on, but must also instill excitement in the play by how excited they get.

This excitement is often brought about by simply speaking in a loud and excited voice, and while it is hard to show this in writing, I will attempt to show when performers are yelling with capital letters.

I mentioned above when Derrick Fisher made a three pointer to tie the game with the Magic in game four of the 2009 NBA finals. Mike Breen called the play as Fisher got the ball, “over to Fisher, Fisher looking. Fisher...puts up a three (as the shot goes in) TIES THE GAME! DERRICK FISHER TIES IT WITH 4.6 REMAINING!”

On 27 September 2009 the Minnesota Vikings were playing the San Francisco 49ers in Minnesota. The Vikings trailed by four with twelve seconds left, and had the ball on the San Francisco thirty-two yard line. The play, in which the Vikings quarterback, Brett Farve, scrambled around, narrowly avoided a tackle, threw and completed a long pass to Greg Lewis to win the game. This sequence was announced by Sam Rosen for the FOX network like this: “Everybody out...Farve Rolls...wants to throw deep and does...to the end zone for (as Lewis catches the pass) for GREG LEWIS...TOUCHDOWN! ...TOUCHDOWN! FARVE DID IT!

Compare this to times that, for some reason the announcers were not excited when they perhaps “should” have been. A quite notable example of this was Joe Buck’s call of David Tyree’s famous helmet catch in Super Bowl forty-two that was broadcast live 3 February 2008 on the FOX network. In the play, a seemingly must convert third and five for the Giants, Eli Manning was almost sacked, he wiggled away from a tackler, threw up a long pass to David Tyree, who somehow caught the ball against his helmet and hung on to it as the defender, Rodney Harrison, bent him backwards to the ground. It really was quite an amazing physical feat. Joe Buck called the play, “Pressure from Thomas off the edge...Eli Manning...stays on his feet... airs it out down the field...it is...caught by Tyree.”

This non-showing of emotion for what some bloggers and Internet writers called “the greatest catch ever” had many up arms. Seth Freilich on pajiba.com wrote, “Buck, apparently, thinks he’s watching a guy in the stand catch a hot dog from a vendor. He is either unwilling or incapable of raising his excitement to match what is happening on the field” (Frelich). Brian Powell at awfulannouncing.com hated Buck’s announcing of that play so much that he synched Marv Albert’s call of the game for Radio with the video of the play. The video was lifted from the site for copy write purposes, but Albert’s call can still be seen on youtube.com. He called the play; “Manning works out of the shotgun...He takes it, facing pressure...he’s in trouble! He’s spun around...he’s able to get away...looks to throw...he does...downfield! And a LEAPING CATCH IS MADE! DOWN AT THE 25! WHAT A PLAY! David Tyree comes up with the ball, and what a play by Eli Manning!” Albert does what Buck does not, which is get excited by a seemingly very exciting play.

We get a sense by all of this that announcers and, to some degree, analysts are supposed to give a real feeling of excitement of what is occurring. It seems that the exhilaration of the play

or the game itself is not necessarily present in a broadcast, and performers must indicate it for us to be able to fully understand and feel what just happened. So, in a sense, the performers do not just have to turn the event into a story, but also have to sell the viewer that the story is worth watching, and is exciting.

This is not to say that there are not great announcers who add significantly to a broadcast, or that watching sports on TV is devoid of any relevance. I have many fond memories of watching the Jazz on TV, and listening to “Hot” Rod Hundley announce for them. It seems like watching broadcast sports can be a very valid and rewarding experience for fans; yet, there is a very clear distinction between the two viewing experiences that viewers should be aware of. Broadcasting does offer convenience, affordability and technology that watching in person, especially with expensive seats, does not, but even with all of the technology, the multiple camera angles, and the performance of the announcer and the analyst, sometimes a game can still lose the attention of the audience. While watching the NFC title game between the Minnesota Vikings and the New Orleans Saints on 24 January 2010, a game that I had a lot of interest in, and seemed by all accounts to be a competitive and entertaining game to watch, I still was not fully immersed in the viewing experience. I drifted off and napped through most of the first quarter, got bored at the end of the second, ate dinner through most of the third, and finally participated with most of my attention in the fourth. By the time overtime rolled around I needed to get my daughter to bed, so I missed the entire conclusion. Compare this with the very involved Chiefs, Bills game I watched. While there was no championship consequence on the line in the game I attended live I was actively watching every play, yet while watching a game critical to deciding who would play in the Super Bowl I was bored. If I had been a diehard Vikings or

Saints fan it might have been different, but as it was the game, and all of the ways broadcast companies try to make it interesting, largely could not hold my attention.

Conclusion

Broadcast companies cannot broadcast the presence and the community experience that are a part of attending sporting events live. Because of this gap in the viewing experience they often attempt to turn sporting events into narratives by way of the announcer and the analyst. These performers make the event into a narrative by giving history of the teams and players, giving commentary of what is going on, and by infusing the broadcast with excitement depending on how excited they themselves become. Often this narrative is aimed at retaining viewers and keeping them interested in the event, and while it does not necessarily replace the presence and community of live attendance, it often does provide a fine way to view and enjoy a sporting event.

Chapter 4 Soothsayers and Prognosticators

“Well folks, when you’re right fifty-two percent of the time, you’re wrong forty-eight percent of the time.”
“Smooth” Jimmy Apollo, a sports analyst on *The Simpsons*, explaining why his pick for that day’s football game was wrong.

Up to now all of the performances I have written about are performed over top of sporting events. Whether they are highlights of a game, or the game itself, sports broadcasting performers must have a version of a sporting event to perform over, yet with each of these performances there is a tendency for the sportscasters to slip into predicting the future. Whether it is predicting the outcome of a game, telling how a play will turn out, or even predicting a champion before a season has even started, sports journalism and broadcasting are both full of statements and predictions by “experts” who attempt to tell what will happen before it actually does, and while nobody is consistently right, the practice continues and perhaps always will.

While watching an NFL pre-game show with my Dad many years ago I remember him saying to me that these shows, and the myriad of predictions they make are strictly for gamblers looking to wager on the game. This, in my youth, had never occurred to me, and while I had no interest in betting on the games, I was watching the program, while not really knowing why I was watching. In reality, I had no reason to watch, and yet I watched nonetheless.

This occurrence of watching something just to watch is in line with a statement made by Debord that I have already stated in chapter 2 yet seems applicable here. Debord states:

The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: “everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear. The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance

that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances. (#12)

With sports programs that detail future events we have a “monopolization of the realm of appearances” met with “passive acceptance” of the audience. The fact that broadcast networks put these shows on; show that they must be “good”. I have found that these shows, rather than give a real understanding of future games merely seem to, as Kellner said, “stupefy social subjects and distract them from the urgent task of real life” (Kellner: 39 tense changed). It seems these shows both stupefy and fill the viewer full of information that is not rooted in anything real, but is mere opinion and hearsay. When broadcasters perform future events the audience is given an interesting mix of Debord’s theories of spectacle, and Heidegger’s ideas on idea talk. Which seems to be an area of passive acceptance by the audience of ungrounded ideas by the sportscasters.

When sportscasters perform about the future they usually do so in one of three ways, what teams have to do to win, what teams *will* do in the near future when broadcasting a game live, and which team will win. I will take a closer look at these three areas.

Looking into the Past

The most common technique that sportscasters use for telling the future, or for telling *how* teams should play in the future, is by looking into the team’s past, explaining their own reasoning, and then explaining how that fits into the future. Super Bowl forty-four was played between the Indianapolis Colts and the New Orleans Saints on 7 February 2010. There are always two weeks in between the conference championships and the Super Bowl, giving two weeks for different performances about how the game would/should go. One such performance was on the *NFL Total Access* on 30 January 2009, where the pundits were talking about what

were the biggest advantages for both teams. Michael Lombardi said that the biggest advantage for the Colts was “their speed on defense.” He continued:

The red zone speed in the defense, specifically when the ball gets moved down there, when Brees is going to have to keep pace with Manning and he’s going to have to score touchdowns, that speed down there becomes certainly a factor because they’re so destructive, and then you add the other factor, ...when you get a dominant defensive front against a great quarterback that’s when you can take over the game, and there’s going to be a sense of urgency to keep up with Payton Manning’s scoring, and that’s when the defensive line takes over.

In this comment Lombardi argues that the Colts biggest advantage is their defensive speed, yet he mentions twice the pressure that Drew Brees will feel to score touchdowns because of Payton Manning, and we assume he means all the points that Manning will score. It seems having Payton Manning would be the biggest advantage for the Colts.

These performances make what the analysts say seem a bit mind numbing. Certainly the Colts speedy defense is one angle, but the Colts were ranked eighteenth in the league in yards given up on defense, and fourteenth in opponent’s passing yards in the 2009 season. Since sports shows put so much emphasis on statistics, which I have covered in chapter 2, why put so much emphasis when the statistics do not seem to support what you are saying. Frankly, it seems the Colt offense, and especially Payton Manning, would be their biggest advantage but Lombardi did not talk about these things when the question of advantages came up. It seems the Colts defense was an angle that the average sports fan may not have considered, whereas everyone who would be watching this show would probably know how great Payton Manning, considered at the time to be the best quarterback in football, and the Colts offense is.

It is this sort of conundrum that these sportscasters get into. They cannot just rattle off information the viewer already knows in case viewers get bored and turn on something else, but they also need to say things that at least seem valid. This was shown on ESPN.com on a segment entitled *Countdown Daily* when there was given “keys to victory” for the Saints on 25 January 2010, and for the Colts 26 January 2010. Trent Dilfer, who as a quarterback for the Baltimore Ravens won a Super Bowl in 2001, said that one of the “key matchups” in the game for the Saints was their linebacker Jonathan Vilma against Peyton Manning for the Colts. Dilfer explained:

Why is Jonathan Vilma...so important? Well, he's going to be asked to do so much, first and foremost he's gotta defend the run...but in the passing game Peyton Manning chews up the middle of the football field...Jonathan Vilma has a huge challenge ahead of him, he's able to play the run on run downs, and in the passing game not get caught up chasing the run fakes. If he can play his responsibility and be a dominant force in this game they may be able to slow down the Indianapolis Colts.

Dilfer also pointed a “key” for a Colts victory when he said he was “intrigued” by the matchup of the Colts safeties against the seam passing of the Saints. He went on:

What is the seam? It is the area on the field between the numbers and hash marks on both sides of the football field. The New Orleans Saints dominate that area in the passing game more than any team in the National Football League. Well the Colts Safeties, Melvin Bullitt and Antoine Bethea, that's going to be their responsibility, to occupy that space so Drew Brees cannot eat it up. If they're able

to do that they're really going to be able to limit the effectiveness of the New Orleans Saints passing game.

A few things stick out from these two comments, first in both Dilfer quickly explains what he is talking about. In the first he explains why he is talking about a Saints linebacker, and in the second he explains what a "seam" is on a football field. This seems to be a way to create interest in viewers. In both quotes he makes a statement, and explains why the statement is valid before he goes on. It seems he anticipates the audience losing interest, and so he explains why he is explaining. This shows that ESPN considers their audience 1) smart enough to be interested in minute details of the game but 2) not smart enough to actually understand what he is talking about, or know the lingo of the game. So Dilfer tries to walk the tightrope of educating those who do not know much about football, and bring insight to those who do.

The second thing that sticks out to me is the fact that, again like Lombardi put forth, the keys to victory were both on the defensive side of the ball. The Saints scored the most points in the 2009 season, and the Colts were seventh in that category. The fact that Dilfer focuses on defense seems to be because, in spite of statistics, everyone would probably know about how great the Saints and Colts offenses are.

And yet, it seems that for all they do to talk about defenses the fact remains that this will probably be a high scoring game with both teams putting a lot of points on the board. It is more interesting for an analyst to point out what the defenses should do rather than pointing out that the offenses are going to score a lot of points. The most needless thing any analyst can say is that the key to the game is to score more points than the other team, yet that is, in fact, the actual point of the game.

It would seem that here is one area where the ideas of spectacle and idle talk come together.⁸ Debord states:

The spectacle is heir to all the weakness of the project of Western philosophy, which was an attempt to understand activity by means of the categories of vision. Indeed the spectacle reposes on an incessant deployment of the very technical rationality to which that philosophical tradition gave rise. So far from realizing philosophy, the spectacle philosophizes reality, and turns the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation. (#19)

“Universe of speculation” seems to be what we are given. As games, and especially championship games, are previewed we are given a wide variety of opinions, commentary and even philosophies on what teams need to do, and how they need to do it. But no one really knows, or can know, what teams actually “need” to do. Certainly some can have ideas, and perhaps those ideas are grounded in that person’s experience, yet even the most experienced sportscaster is left to mere speculation when it comes to how future events will unfold. Trent Dilfer telling us what a seam is, and how New Orleans’ owns them, and explaining how Peyton Manning “chews up” opposing defenses, while filling air does not seem to really connect us with anything essential. Instead we are given what seem to be time fillers in anticipation for the “big game.”

When we consider the sheer fact of how much time has to be filled by networks compared to how much time an “important” game actually takes it is astounding. There was roughly three hundred and thirty three hours between the end of the NFC Championship game,

⁸ I’m very aware that typically the ideas Debord and Heidegger would not be complementary at all, and that the two seems at odds in most areas. Yet, this intersection of sports media seems to be an area where a few of their ideas are actually in harmony.

and the beginning of the Super Bowl in 2010. That is a lot of content to be filled by networks between games. And while the evening of and day after the conference championship round will be filled with commentary about the past games, most of the football related content on sports channels will be speculating on how the next game is going to go. The number of hours and days of broadcasting to fill seems to guarantee the use idle talk.

As I discussed in chapter 3, idle talk is communicating that is or seems to be groundless and apart from, as Heidegger puts it a “primordial” source. He writes:

What is spoken about as such spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character. Things are so because one says so. Idle talk is constituted in this gossiping and passing the word along, a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on increases to complete groundlessness. (157)

In these situations it seems we have to accept the “expert” analysis and opinions because they say it is so, without looking into something for ourselves. Heidegger seems leery for any of us to accept something, and feel we “understand” it before we have really struggled with the understanding of it. Just accepting this idle talk makes us think we understand, but our understanding is not grounded. This is problematic because, rather than having really anything to do with the sport, or two teams playing within the rules, we have merely an abstraction of an event, which is meant to hold our attention for the revenue of the broadcasters.

And so, this area of sportscasting seems to represent an interesting crossing of these two theories. Sportscasters put forth ideas of how teams should play, and infer that these ideas are good and important. We assume these analysts know what they are talking about, and largely accept their ideas, but the relevance of what they say, and the depth of their knowledge is

questionable. We can never know if what is being said is truly relevant or grounded, yet since it is presented, we largely take it as “good.” It is so because “they say so.”

Gazing into the Near Future

Analysts, for some reason or the other, are asked quite often what they think will happen next, especially in the closing minutes of a close game. Two examples from NBA finals games stand out.

I have written about when Derek Fisher made a game tying shot in game four of the 2009 NBA finals that was broadcast on ABC on 11 June 2009. The Lakers were down by two with 10.8 seconds remaining. During a timeout before the play Mike Breen, the announcer, asked Marc Jackson and Stan Van Gundy, the analysts, if they would go for two or three on the following play. Jackson stated to go for two “unless the three was there” which seemed to not really answer Breen’s question. Van Gundy responded “with the way the Magic are shooting free throws I’m gonna go right to the rim for a quick two.” Both analysts pointed out the Magic should foul before the Lakers get off a good shot. As has been mentioned in chapter three, Fisher drained a three pointer to tie and send the game into overtime.

Another example of prognosticating an impending play came from the 1987 NBA finals game played on 9 June 1987 and was announced by Dick Stockton and analyzed by Tommy Heinsohn. With the Lakers down by two with twelve seconds to play and in bounding the ball at half court Stockton asked Heinsohn “Now, Tommy, where do you go now if you’re LA?” to which Heinsohn replied “ Magic...or Worthy”. This was a puzzling response in that Kareem Abdul-Jabar’s skyhook was considered one of the most unstoppable shots in basketball. The Lakers threw the ball to Magic Johnson who passed to Abdul-Jabbar who was almost immediately fouled.

Both of these examples show analysts, not only trying to judge the future, but also judging it incorrectly. For Van Gundy it was picking the most likely scenario, that ultimately wasn't what occurred. For Heinsohn it was almost a memory lapse not to mention really the most likely scenario.

These examples show that there really is no way to determine what will happen within a game or even a play, yet analysts are consistently put on the spot to predict the unpredictable, and really there is no accountability for them if they are right or wrong. It is interesting to note that most of the time analysts seem to either give an extremely vague answer, like Jackson's, or a specific one that turns out wrong, like Van Gundy's or Heinsohn's.

The only reason I can even think to make such predictions is simply to fill time and create anticipation. Mostly when performers talk about what will happen next it is to fill a gap left by a time out or other stoppage of play. Using predictions is one way to prevent viewers from growing bored and changing the channel. The practice is meant to create an itch in the viewer that when the play ultimately takes place will be relieved. These comments, again, seem to not to be rooted in the real essence of the game, and seem to try to pacify the audience.

As I have mentioned there is no looking back at the comment after it is been said. Once a statement is made it typically is not remembered, and in the flow of the game incorrect prognostications are forgotten and forgiven. Never once, to my recollection, has somebody who was incorrect brought to task either during the game or afterwards. It is as if the statements are to be forgotten even as they are uttered. The comments seem to fill time, distract viewers from the channel changer, and disappear.

What has come to be expected in any sort of segment or show that previews games, especially championship games, or complete seasons are predictions from anybody and

everybody on the outcome of the game or season. These predictions come in an assortment of ways, from a mathematical approach where the performers use stats and numbers to formulate the victor, to a more mystical approach where the performer uses non tangible ways of predicting, such as their gut, or noting that it is the team's "destiny" to win based on reasons of luck or karma, while some use almost a mixture of stats and hunches to predict winners. Again, it seems to be an interesting intersection of spectacle and idle talk.

Predicting a Season

So often sports analysts and commentators are asked to make predictions on an entire season. Peter King wrote for a special Sports Illustrated column on the 2009 fantasy football year that Tom Brady would win "comeback player of the year and MVP... I see a 4500 yard year and 14 wins in his regular season" (17). In the same article King wrote about picking Running Back Steve Slaton with your fantasy first round pick, "In January, after he has given you 1,900 total yards and 14 touchdowns. Slaton will be known as the bargain pick of the year" (17).

Brady was close to King's prediction in yards at 4398, and did win comeback player of the year, but was far from a 14-win season with 10, and not a factor in MVP voting. The Patriots, while making the playoffs, lost badly in the first round, which was far below pre-season expectations. Slaton was an even bigger bust, gaining just 854 total yards and 7 touchdowns.

While King's predictions of these two players production wasn't perfect, it was, all in all, not too bad. As King based his opinions on conversations he had had with "coaches, personal people, and players", and made guesses based on information they gave him, and even then he seems to be wrong most of the time. Broadcast pundits often do not have the kind of inside access King has, but their predictions are usually about as effective as King's were.

A segment entitled “Cover 2” on the morning show *First Take* on ESPN 2 at the beginning of the 2008 football season, 4 September 2008, before even a single game had been played, a panel of writers and analysts gave the teams they thought would play in and win the Super Bowl for that year. Jim Trotter from Sports Illustrated, Dan Pompei from the Chicago Tribune and Charean Williams from the Forth Worth Star Telegram all picked the San Diego Chargers. Trotter stated, “The fact that they got to the AFC championship game...and the fact that they could take the New England Patriots into the fourth quarter [in that game]...bodes well for them this season.” Pompei said, “The Chargers, to me, are a team that runs the ball well, plays good defense, and I think they have a great young quarterback in Phillip Rivers.” Williams, while taking the Chargers to win the Super Bowl, talked more about the New Orleans Saints who she picked to make it to the Super Bowl for the NFC. “Drew Brees had a great season last season...they’ve improved their defense, and I think Sean Payton is one of the best young coaches in the league. I think the Saints get to the Super Bowl and I think they lose to the San Diego Chargers.” Dan Stroud from the St. Petersburg Times explained he was not picking the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, where he was from, “because the Super Bowl is in Tampa and there’s never been a home team play in it, but that’s the only reason.” before he picked the Cowboys to lose to the Colts in the Super Bowl because, “Payton Manning, what would a Super Bowl be with out a Manning, for starters? And Tony Dungy going back to Tampa, there’s some serendipity there, that maybe he walks away now, and just drives down the street and goes home and, it is all over.”

This segment yields some interesting insights as to how sportscasters perform the unfolding of future events. For Trotter the Chargers would win due to their past playoff experience. Williams and Pompei said the Chargers and Saints would excel because of

excellence in the basics of football -- good defense, coaching, good quarterbacks, -- which all fits into the idea of looking into the past to tell the future. But Stroud makes a prediction based on analogies. “What is a Super Bowl without a Manning?” and the “serendipity” of Tony Dungy retiring after the game is played where he used to coach and owns a home. We have predictions based on past performance and factors outside of the game or the players.

Interestingly enough nobody was right about anything. None of the teams mentioned -- Colts, Cowboys, Saints or Chargers -- made the Super Bowl, and only two of those teams -- Colts and Chargers -- made the playoffs, both losing before the AFC championship game. Yet, all of these teams made the playoffs the following year, and as has been mentioned, the Colts and Saints played in the Super Bowl. It seemed the predictions of some were more apt for the following season than the one in which they were based.

We can see that when it comes to predicting an entire seasons outcome the methods that use analogies and mystical elements are sometimes as effective as using statistics, and that effectiveness seems based more on luck than on anything else. We see clearly that these predictions are not rooted in anything substantial because frankly, no one can tell the future.

Predicting a Game

When predicting the outcomes of games the same two techniques, past statistics or gut feelings, are used to pick winners, and many different approaches are taken when explaining picks.

John Clayton, a sports writer for ESPN.com, successfully predicted that the Saints and the Colts would advance to the Super Bowl on 5 January 2010, at the beginning of the playoffs. Clayton picked the Colts to be in the Super Bowl “because of Payton Manning.” The Saints he chose, in spite of team difficulties at the end of the season, because, “they have a chance to rest

for a week, they have Drew Brees, (and) they have the home crowd.” He then stated, “My odds say right now that it will be Indianapolis winning the Super Bowl.”

Clayton seems to make his Super Bowl team predictions based on simple and obvious facts. Because the Colts have Payton Manning, and the Saints have Drew Brees, a week to rest and the home crowd those will be the two teams. He was right. The unclear statement comes from the fact that “his odds”, whatever they are, state that the Colts will win the Super Bowl, a statement that seems to be either based on gambling odds, or his own unexplained logic.

On ESPN’S *Countdown Daily* posted on ESPN.com on 5 February 2010 Mark Schlereth, who played Offensive Guard for twelve seasons and won three Super Bowls, picked the Colts because they have Peyton Manning, a quick defense (sound familiar?) and because they were, “a sure tackling team, they do not miss tackles.” Teddy Bruschi, a former Linebacker who also won three Super Bowls, also picked the Colts explaining that he liked their defense, and stated:

I will tell you what picking this game comes down to, you’re either gonna pick with your head or your heart. I think everyone’s heart feels for the city of New Orleans, and they *want* that city to experience a world championship, but their head just tells you that the Indianapolis Colt are one of the best teams, I think, maybe, ever play this game...I think they go on and win the Super Bowl.

Clayton’s is one of the few predictions that state the obvious when picking teams, and was correct in his guesses. Schlereth was similar, but added the tackling angle which was a new point, and Bruschi picked the Colts, first for their defense, but explained that his heart was with the Saints but his head was picking the Colts, for no statistical reason other than they “one of the best teams...ever.” We are given recycled information, with new slants and minute insights to keep us watching.

While these “experts” weigh in on who will win, and how that will happen there are diverse ways of picking teams that are shown on these types of programs. “Planet Xbox 360” uses an EA sports game series “John Madden Football” or “Madden” to simulate games before they are played. These results are published on various web sites, including ESPN.com. As of the 2010 Super Bowl the simulations had been correct five of the last six Super Bowls, and had correctly predicted not only that the Saints and the Colts would win the conference championship games, but had given a reasonably close outcomes of the games -- The Colts had beaten the Jets 30 – 17, the simulation put it at 31 – 17. The Saints beat the Vikings 34 – 31, the simulation had it at 31 – 28 (Stats and Trends). -- The simulation defied the odds makers, who put the Colts at five point favorites, and picked the Saints to win 35 – 31. These simulations are based on, like has been said, players abilities and past statistics, and then having representations of the players square off in virtual reality.

This virtual square off is the ultimate in using past statistics as a way to judge outcomes, as any actual human element is broken down to computer codes and programming into a complete and total abstraction of the game. What is interesting is how effective these simulations seem to be, judging the outcomes correctly so often. And while almost any expert or analyst chose the Colts, the computer correctly chose the Saints. It would seem that perhaps the games and the players are easier to figure out through graphics and programming than through human analysis.

But another approach to predicting success in the Super Bowl was used in a segment called “Sports Science” on ESPN, which aired 3 February 2010, the segment pointed out that all of the quarterbacks who have won a Super Bowl since 2000 “was at least 6’ 4’”, weighed at least 215 pounds, and was born in either Georgia, California, Ohio or Louisiana.” It is then pointed

out that Drew Brees fits none of these criteria, and was born in Texas, a state that has “never produced a Super Bowl winning quarterback. The host of the segment, John Brenkus, then stated, “but maybe height, weight and geography are not the physical stats we should use to predict the next Super Bowl winning quarterback, maybe we should analyze the way a quarterback looks.” The segment then goes on to explain how Dr. Stephen Marquardt uses “The Golden Ratio” or “phi” or “1: 1.618” to predict a quarterback’s effectiveness. Based on these dimensions Marquardt created a facial outline he called “the golden mask” and the more a quarterbacks face fits within the confines of this mask, the more effective the quarterback would be. In reference to the mask, where the mouth is 1.618 the size of the nose and the eyes are 1.618 the size of the mouth, Marquardt remarked, “the more you look like this the stronger and more healthy you’re going to be, and the better leader you’re going to be because people respond to that look”

The report then states that the quarterbacks of the last ten Super Bowl-winning teams fit this facial profile better than the quarterbacks they opposed. According to this approach to prognosticating the winner, Dr. Marquardt predicted that Peyton Manning fit the golden mask better, and would therefore win the Super Bowl. This was a “scientific” approach that had nothing to do with past success or statistics, but with the facial structures of the quarterbacks.

Conclusion

We see that there are dozens of opinions, theories, and predictions on how games and seasons will turn out. These performers use statistics, gut feelings, simulations and even strange scientific theories on facial structures to predict winners. These predictions certainly aim to assist gamblers but also act as a way to get viewers to watch, even when there are no games on and no highlights to roll. While these shows and performances certainly attempt to make viewers more

aware and educated of the sport they are talking about, which they sometimes do very effectively, it seems that many times they pump viewers full of idle talk, or information that is not grounded in, as Heidegger put it, a “primordial source.” In this way these shows do not connect an audience with any sort of essence of the sports or games but rather hold onto an audience merely for the sake of profit.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

“Boo-Yeah.”
Stuart Scott

I mentioned in my introduction that there are times when live performance is preferable to mediatized, and times when mediatized would be preferable to live. The same seems to be in line with sports. While being present for games gives the presence and community aspects of viewing I have referred to, there are times when viewing games and events on the television are either preferable or the only choice. When the 2002 Winter Olympic games came to Salt Lake City, one hour away from where I lived it was to me like they were being held in a far off country. I had neither the time nor the resources to attend events in person and, as such, watched events on TV, like most of the world. I am sure attending events could have been paradigm altering, but I was not able to do it.

And yet, watching the Olympics on TV can be a fantastic way to enjoy a series of sports aimed at uniting countries and showcasing athletes that strive to do their best. Certainly there are some commodified aspects that are bothersome – the long string of commercials if you tune in at the wrong time – but there can be a real feeling of unity among those who watch and cheer for their nation. Most people that watch sports, and the Olympics particularly, watch from a television set.

One of the benefits of watching sports on TV is the fact that they are typically far more economically available. I have mentioned that having an immersive sports experience is often tied directly to the proximity of a person’s seat at a live event, and while “cheap seats” are available at many sporting events and perhaps are “affordable,” it is debatable if such seats would give a better experience than watching the game at home on TV. I have written about my

family's tickets to Utah Jazz games and how our attendance has steadily decreased as ticket prices have increased. My dad has noticed, over time, that his neighbors at games are not really fans anymore per se but employees whose companies have season tickets. The "lower bowl" (the lower half of the arena) has become very corporatized.

Another issue facing many "casual" fans is the site where their team's play. An increasing number of teams in professional sports are building expensive stadiums and arenas, many times with public money, with an increasing number of luxury boxes, and higher and higher ticket prices. It seems that many fans in a lower income bracket would have a hard time ever being able to afford seats close to the playing area. And yet, watching on TV is not like watching in person. The distance of broadcasting and the performances of the sportscasters render the event as truly different, which is not necessarily a negative thing. Although broadcasting does change the event, it can still be enjoyed, and fans can have an immersive, connected experience with the team and players they follow. Highlight and preview shows have the ability give some connection to fans wanting to support their teams. For people to be able to support, to engage in some way is surely better than not being able to support at all.

Which brings me to my point: My intention in this thesis *is not* to decry these programs but rather to point out what they actually are. We many times are not given the game but rather representations of the game. Viewers should be aware of the distinction and aware of how the sportscasters are used to keep them watching. Many, including me, enjoy these shows, but I hope we can watch them realizing the ways they attempt to capture our interests for their profit.

Hopefully, as viewers of highlight shows, live broadcasts, and pre-game shows we can objectively watch and be aware of times of manipulation, idle talk, and non-inclusion. We can still enjoy the good qualities and insights these shows offer while seeing how they are

influencing or attempting to influence us as viewers. And as we enjoy sports, both mediatized and in person, we can appreciate the non-spotlighted players and the minute intricacies that make being a spectator such a rich experience. If we can all become objective, aware spectators we can see things as they really are, and not believe all the hype.

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