

## The Super Bowl

By Arthur Shapiro

In 2025, the game is scheduled for February 9 at the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana. It is Super Bowl LIX.

It would be fun to look at this uniquely and widely popular event from several perspectives, all of which have to do more with the event than the game itself.

Let's start with this: Why do they use Roman Numerals, forcing people to remember what they hoped to forget in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade?

The reason goes back to the origin of the game. Lamar Hunt, who owned the KC Chiefs, introduced this approach to keep track of the championship bowls, and Super Bowl V was the first to be numbered using this system. The NFL media guide adds:

*"The Roman numerals were adopted to clarify any confusion that may occur because the Super Bowl is played in the year following a chronologically recorded season."* I think they just wanted to be pretentious.

It is the world's most-watched event and the second-largest American food consumption event, behind Thanksgiving dinner. It is also among the top drinking events, although the trend toward no- and low-alcohol consumption may dampen that.

Controversies: Two stand out in my mind.

The Heidi Bowl was not a Super Bowl but set the standard for broadcasting major professional sports events. In 1968, NBC switched off a game between the Oakland Raiders and the New York Jets to broadcast a made-for-TV version of the children's story. The Raiders scored two touchdowns in nine seconds, and viewers were outraged and complained so vociferously that network execs learned a lesson they'll never forget: "Whatever you do," one said, "you better not leave an NFL football game."

Who can forget the halftime show of Super Bowl XXXVIII, which attracted controversy following an incident in which Justin Timberlake removed a piece of Janet Jackson's top, briefly exposing one of her breasts before the broadcast quickly cut away from the shot?



Interestingly, the halftime shows at the early SB events involved high school and college marching bands. It's a far cry from the mega millions spent on halftime shows these days. I don't know about you, but at SB parties I've attended, more people pay attention to these shows than the game. As the SB grew in importance, corporations and Madison Avenue realized they could increase audiences with an entertainment addition to the game.

Ad Age reported that SB 2023 commercial time has nearly been sold out (as of September 2022). Fox network has sold 95% of its "inventory," charging \$7 million for a 30-second spot. Some (foolish) advertisers spend their entire ad budget on this game. In 2022, there were 60 commercials, so the clutter makes the ad investment far from worthwhile.

On the other hand, corporations with big pockets have produced tremendous and memorable ads over the years. The Apple SB commercial in 1984 put the company on the map. That same year, remember "Where's The Beef?" or "Mean Joe Greene and Coke" in 1980? How about the perennial Budweiser ads, especially the frogs? As a marketing guy, I often paid more attention to the ads than the game, and, with my wife focusing mainly on the halftime show, in my home, parties or not, the game itself was low on the interest level. Sorry, football fans.

This brings me to Super Bowl XXIX in 1995, San Francisco vs. San Diego. Despite my lukewarm interest in the Super Bowl (except when the New York Giants are in it), attending the game was always on my bucket list, and this was the game I attended.

The Seagram people held a corporate event for distributors, the trade, and a few chosen 'suits' from the NY office. Boy, was I excited... I was finally at a Super Bowl, the big game, the hoopla, the parties, the excitement of seeing the game live, the celebrities, and the fanfare that was a part of it. Allow me to rephrase that sentence opening — Boy, was I disappointed. They should have called it the **Stupor** Bowl.

On game day, buses took us to the Seagram tent for food, drink, and a lecture on what to expect from Dan Fouts, a retired hall-of-fame quarterback. It was interesting until we realized we were missing the kick-off. We all dropped our hamburgers and Captain Morgan and Cokes and hurried to our seats. Two disappointments immediately come up. My seat was equipped with an oxygen mask because of the location and altitude. Second, there was a padded cushion on my seat, which was very thoughtful until I noticed that it was an ad for GTE, a large independent telephone company at the time. And I was expected, like everyone else in the stadium, to hold it up for a commercial so America could see 50,000 schnooks playing extras for an ad.

It was a so-so game, with San Francisco beating San Diego 49 to 26. As I researched the Super Bowl, I learned that Men's Journal rated it among the ten worst SB games in history.

My bucket list adventure ended with a corporate event, not a game, and to the extent that it was a game, it was among the worst ever.

It comes under the heading “careful what you wish for.”