

# SPORTS 2050

by

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Let me go out on a limb here and make a prediction. By the year 2050, professional sports as we know it today will have an entire new look. Oh the games will be played pretty much the same, but the way it's all set up will be entirely different.

I see the day when it will no longer be the San Diego Padres vs. the New York Mets in San Diego, but rather the Pepsi Cola Pads vs. the Microsoft Mets playing a three game set in Boston. There will be no home teams. Teams will be owned and operated by American corporations with over-stuffed advertising execs pulling the reins. League offices will feature schedules that put teams in all these new baseball stadiums – now being built and named by corporate America – without regard for home/away, small/large market issues.

Say you live in San Diego. You will say, “Hey, let’s go to a baseball game this weekend”. Your friend will say, “Sure, who’s going to be in town?” You will look at your schedule and say with great excitement, “Ooooooh, the Wrigley Cubs are playing the Blockbuster Pirates!”

Sounds nuts, doesn’t it? But trust me on this, we are already well on our way to doing just that in sports.

Over the last ten-fifteen years, we have seen communities and fans lose more and more say in what happens in sports. And league offices are doing nothing to stop this trend. When you’re sleeping with the enemy, how can you vote against them? Let’s look at it.

It wasn’t that long ago that NASCAR was the only sport that blatantly allowed its’ sponsors to use them as billboards on wheels. Every car and jump suit was an advertising execs canvas. Most of us pretty much ignored it because, after all, it was just NASCAR.

But anyone who knows anything about marketing will say that if you give

advertisers an inch, they will absolutely take the whole planet.

What once was exclusive to NASCAR is now infiltrating every major sport with no signs of anyone standing up to stop it.

Look at golf. It prides itself in being a gentleman's sport that holds true to its traditions. If you buy into that than you have been living in a cave.

It use to be the San Diego Open, the L.A.Open, the Phoenix Open, the Bob Hope Classic in Palm Springs and of course the Bing Crosby Pebble Beach Open. It was great for the Chamber of Commerce to have the PGA come through your community. Not only with the blimp shots showing the great landscape of your fine community, but the commentators would always make small talk selling your city.

Not so any more. I challenge you to sit through a Sunday afternoon and catch a commentator slip and inform you where it is this particular golfing event is taking place. They now only mention it in passing.

Why? Because it no longer matters. It's the Buick Open, the Toyota Open, the Viagra Classic, whatever. They don't care where it's played because the advertisers are putting up the big bucks that affords them the right to have commentators mention them throughout the telecast until they put their cute little face in front of the camera to hand over their fat paychecks to the winners.

If San Diego doesn't like it, the advertising execs would be more than happy to take their Open elsewhere. And though the Chamber of Commerce will work hard to convince us that it is still a good thing for the city to have the PGA come to town, the bottom line is that the benefits have become marginal at best.

And that's just golf. Tennis is becoming the same way. And don't think for a moment that our beloved team sports are excluded from the jaws of advertisers.

Turn on the TV on New Year's Day for crying out loud. The whole Bowl system has become an advertisers' billboard.

New stadiums are going up all over and they are being named after computer chips and high-tech garbage that no one can pronounce. Heck, we have a new stadium here in my home that has just been named after a company

that is based out of Boston ... and I can assure you that we are nowhere near Boston. Why? Money talks. It goes to the highest bidder.

So as a sports fan, I would respond that this would all be a great deal if at least I can save some of my hard-earned money in the process.

Sorry sports fan, in financial terms, you are being screwed - again.

You spend eighty bucks for a pair of tennis shoes that cost seven bucks to make in some foreign sweatshop. Why? So said company can splash its logo all over our football, baseball and golfing heroes. Every time you go through the check out stand, you are paying taxes that prove your loyalty to your favorite team so they can build that nice stadium that is being named after some company that has nothing to do with your community. And if you have any money left over and are fortunate enough to take junior to a ball game, you will easily dump fifty to seventy-five bucks per person to enjoy a two-hour sporting event.

Corporate America is moving quickly, my friends, and there is little that you and I can do to stop it.

Sure they'll sugar coat it and convince us that this is all good for us. They will tell us that we, the fans, are the real benefactors of this new sports world. Why, we'll be able to go to 'our' stadium all year long and see all the teams play. It will become like the local theater. Run a show for three nights, then pack them off to the next city while a new set of teams starts a series the next night.

And the fans will buy into it because they will have grown weary of rooting for their hometown heroes only to watch them sign lucrative contracts in the winter with their most dreaded rivals. How nice it will be to root for a team simply because you like them, not because they wear the name of your home on it's jersey. And how many times has your home team really sucked and you wished you could see some of the more exciting teams in your town?

It's the only way the player unions and owners will be able to save the games. No more whining about money problems in small markets. Your team is owned by big corporations who need you as human billboards to go from city to city playing your games in the name of good advertising for us. You will spend your season pretty much on the road – just like recording artists and other

performers. That is the price of being in the entertainment business, you know.

I know it all sounds a bit crazy at first, but the more I think about it, the more I'm certain that there are already plans in the works for making this transition in the sports world an eventual reality.

The sports fan will always come to the game. Our hearts have been broken many more times at the stadium than the drive-in theater. The players and owners know that. The players who play the game and the executives who control it have always told us that it's a business. But to the father who is taking his child to their first ball game, it will never be. And while the corporate Gods are taking care of business, we will continue to embrace the magic that makes it anything but a business.

I'm afraid our hearts will be broken again. I give them half of this new century to do the deed. In many sports, if you look closely, it is already being done. Play ball!