

Sports and Money

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 entirely 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 corporate America and billionaires, and the league office will feature a schedule that puts teams in all these new baseball stadiums without regard for home/away issues.

Say you live in San Diego. You would say, "Hey, let's go to a baseball game this weekend". Your friend would 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 Captain Morgan Pirates!"

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

Over the last ten-fifteen years, we have seen communities and fans lose more and more say in what happens in sports. And the league offices are doing nothing to stop this trend. Hey, 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 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 winner.

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 through, 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 companies 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 tell 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 not benefitting at all.

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.

The bottom line is that advertising companies are taking over our beloved sports world. They gouge us when we buy their shoes. They gouge us when we buy our groceries. They gouge us again when we show up for another game. And there is nothing we, the sports fans, can do about it, because those in a position to do anything to stop them simply won't.

How ironic that advertisers, whose sole purpose in life is to come up with cute little jingles to convince us that one toothpaste is better than the next, have become the most powerful force in our sports world today... and they are just getting started, my friends.

Baseball, football, basketball and hockey are all showing signs. They all have their 'showcase' games in Mexico City, Europe, Field of Dreams, etc. It's a great opportunity to sell our sport, they will tell you. Do they give any consideration to the local fans with season tickets who lost those games? Of course not.

And the uniforms. It use to be a team would have their home uniforms and away uniforms. Every team is moving more and more towards wardrobes that reflect so many styles and colors to celebrate the many events that advertisers love to promote. And they are all making money using their uniforms as billboards, that it's just a matter of time before these sports look an awful lot like NASCAR.

So you still think I'm nuts with my prediction for 2050? Actually, I think it's going to come about sooner than that. I was just hoping that it wouldn't happen until after I've left this crazy world and 2050 puts me right at 100.

