

Opponents prepare for Super Bowl battles

By Bruce A. Love

Let the games begin! It's Super Bowl Sunday tomorrow, and my Eagles are ready to soar! I am in eastern Pennsylvania, the very heart of Eagles country, as I sit down to write this column. The streets are lined with green, Eagles jerseys are everywhere, and there is only one topic discussed on local talk radio and television programs -- Super Bowl XXXIX. Believe me, Philly Phans have got the Phever!

The Super Bowl is the time to "put it all on the line." Wide Receiver Terrell Owens is doing just that as he ignores the advice of doctors, suits up, and risks it all for what could be the biggest game of his career. Owens is not the only one putting it on the line this weekend. In addition to being the biggest sporting event of the year, the Super Bowl provides the ultimate stage for advertisers as they roll out carefully crafted commercials for their big broadcast debut.

The Fox network has sold 59 slots to advertisers so they can take advantage of the largest television audience of the year. An estimated 90 million viewers in 63 percent of US homes are expected to view the game and the commercials (which are watched by some more closely than the game).

Unlike the Eagles and the Patriots who had to defeat other teams to earn their right to play on Sunday, the opportunity to present a 30 second commercial during the game is open to any company. The only catch is that it will cost \$2.4 million to do so - and that's just for airtime! Production for some commercials, such as the one Go Daddy is planning to run, will cost companies over \$1 million to produce!

One has to question the motivation behind advertising during the Super Bowl. Is the exposure really worth the cost? Anheuser-Busch has bought 10 of the 59 slots available. That's \$24 million! If we make our math simple and assume a case of beer costs \$12, the effect of Super Bowl advertising should at least translate into 2 million more cases being sold just to cover the cost of advertising during one game! When you factor in the

cost of the product and overhead, the expectation should be that the 5 minutes of commercials lead to 4 million more cases of Bud sold. Is that reasonable? Maybe. What Anheuser-Busch is attempting to do each year is influence the consumer audience coming of age. If persuaded by these clever and entertaining commercials, a new generation may become loyal consumers for years to come. One look at the Busch bottom line suggests that this strategy appears to work!

Most people believe that there is more to Super Bowl commercials than just the expectation of increased revenues for the companies. Part of the allure of running these high profile ads is for bragging rights. After all, if only 1 beer brewer is featured during the Super Bowl (a condition specified by Bud in an exclusive rights clause of their contract), couldn't they arguably claim to be "the King of beers?" If your beer is "second best," it won't be seen on Sunday!

Another competition that takes place is between advertising agencies. This is a chance for them to showcase their best stuff so that potential clients will be impressed with their abilities enough to seek their services. They are probably the biggest winners off the field during this annual ritual, as they are paid for displaying their own talents.

Super Bowl XXXIX will be the first one in a long time that I actually have more interest in the game than the commercials. As a marketing professor/professional, I enjoy analyzing the technical execution, effectiveness, and entertainment value of these commercial productions. Part of me regrets that I don't have an extra \$2.4 million lying around so that I could compete against the big boys. OK, maybe all of me regrets that. But if I had ads featured during the game on Sunday, I would have to believe that they would generate revenues greater than the cost to produce the ads.

So, let the games begin! Show us what you've got. Fly, Eagles Fly!

In the words of the late, Tug McGraw, "Ya Gotta Believe!"

Love Consulting
600 Oakmont Place
Roaring Spring, PA 16673
814-224-2651

articles@loveconsulting.com

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