

On January 23, 2008, my wife made a casual observation at our dinner table in Sacramento, California. Her employer owned purchase rights for seats at Super Bowl XLII as a New York Giants season ticket holder. The Giants would be taking on the 18-0 New England Patriots in Glendale, Arizona.

Due to a recent surgery, my wife's boss was unable to attend. The tickets were three thousand miles away at the Giants Stadium box office in the Meadowlands. Until then, my game plan was to be watching TV along with millions of other fans on February 3, 2008. Then everything changed quickly as there was limited time to make a series of pressure packed personal and financial decisions.

Over the next ten frantic days, I would enlist another family member to navigate the steps of the Super Bowl lottery process with transferred purchase rights. Then I would enter the ruthless secondary ticket market to secure a third seat. Along the way, I encountered internet scams and relentless real time auctioneering. I would learn and apply valuable business lessons and experience some of which I hope will help fans be better consumers and less subject to exploitation or fraud.

In the end, I would witness in person one of the greatest upsets in the history of the NFL alongside thousands of lifelong Giants fans. My role as an "accidental spectator" resurrected childhood memories, lent connected meaning to personal and career events, and presented me with a microcosm of our turbulent social and economic times.

Those ten days served as inspiration for me to write a book, my first, titled *Making The Big Game: Tales of an Accidental Spectator*.

The first month of 2009 proved to be nearly as hectic as the previous January. I finalized the book and networked with new friends and old in the media - particularly in radio - where I have worked in advertising for many years.

The original manuscript was twelve chapters and just over two hundred pages. Eleven of those chapters are personal narrative built around those mostly sleepless ten days before the Big Game.

As the clock rolled closer to this year's Super Bowl and I dealt with the countless minor details associated with editing, formatting, checking and rechecking, I agonized over one important question.

Should I include in the final published work, the twelfth chapter? It was a fictional postscript to the real life events of *Making The Big Game*. It was a personal vision of how the Big Game might look through the eyes of fans and media in the year 2039. Thirty years is far enough out for radical change to occur, yet it also is a time span that unfolds within a natural lifetime. At age 46, my first memories of pro football date to the NFL-AFL merger when the game bore little resemblance to the current edition. What would Vince Lombardi think of today's Super Bowl? Would he even recognize it? How differently will the game look to us when as many years have passed *again*?

Working in the rapidly changing world of professional media and having had some experience with sports marketing, I naturally extended some visible current trends.

I created a hypothetical protagonist, Matt Rodgers, a Green Bay Packers fan who I think of as a kind of blogger on steroids. His hobby has become bigger than life because of technology and a little dumb luck. Then I globalized football. Then I changed the way we view it and interact with it.

To make the story more believable, I inserted real life people from 2009 and 'aged' them 30 years fictionalizing their later lives and mingling them with my contrived characters. These real life persons include one current and one retired NFL star, a national radio host and one of his long time listeners, and two briefly referenced business executives. I also reference several actual companies in the context of hypothetical globalized team sponsorships.

Ultimately, I decided at the last moment to avoid the even the slightly chance of potentially complicated issues arising over publishing for profit a chapter that was simply fun for me to write. I chose to make the original Chapter 12, titled Super Bowl LXXII, freely available online as a personal short story. If you enjoy it, perhaps you'll also like my eleven chapter book, the completely non-fictional prequel if you will, *Making The Big Game: Tales of an Accidental Spectator*. If you've already read the book, this material will be a logical extension. If you haven't, you'll still find this story stands independently. Enjoy the Big Game and thanks for reading about it whether in 2009 or 2039.

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January 2009

The Big Game in 2039

A Short Story by Jeffrey Fekete

Matt Rodgers flipped open the connect port on his Hyundai Vista. He pointed his mobile interfacer at one of the sleek, cylindrical tubes mounted along the service island row at the Marathon Charge 'N Go in downtown Green Bay. Interfacers had become indispensable appliances in daily life.

With one tap on the interfacer touch screen, the wire extending from the tube to the connect port carried the current into the vehicle's charging system. The surge lasted about twelve seconds. The transfer would power his vehicle for at least five hundred miles. Matt did not miss the days of borrowing his Dad's dated Prius PHEV-1 plug-in hybrid. Even with an upgrade pack, the old man's car still required overnight charging unless you wanted to burn fifty-dollar-a-gallon, super-refined ethanol in the small emergency reserve tank. He preferred his Vista for getting around the Great Lakes region. Matt would likely be in the market soon for a newer model. He could soon afford it, given his recent success and regional celebrity on the verge of going global.

An indicator light on the charging tube signaled the surge was complete. Matt closed the connect port. As he returned to the driver's seat, a soothing female voice emerged from the interfacer. Her words were instantly visible as digital text across his dashboard.

"Matt, your energy account has been charged 48.25 at 1227 CST Saturday, March 5, 2039."

"One day to go," he thought.

Tomorrow would be Super Bowl Sunday.

Super Bowl LXXII was in his hometown. The big game was returning to North America for the first time in three years and for only the second time ever to Green Bay. Though Matt's beloved Packers had not advanced through the play-offs this season, it was still thrilling to know the event was on his doorstep. The city had managed to sell league officials on locating the game here based on moderating March temperatures. The waiver of stadium rental fees helped as well. Green Bay's rich football heritage sealed the deal.

Playing up the game's original roots remained a priority for all team owners and the league commissioner. New roots were taking hold in places far from the shore of Lake Michigan.

This afternoon Matt would head to his favorite watering hole and true passion. Before that, he had one important appointment. He turned onto Lombardi Avenue and passed Lambeau Field. The stately edifice built in 1957 had aged well. Lambeau still hosted concerts and soccer matches popular with Wisconsin's large first- and second-generation immigrant community. The Packers still used the facility for open-air training camps and practice scrimmages. Matt's father, Chris, still enjoyed taking his son to the Krafton Cheese Packers Fan Fest every August at Lambeau. Matt knew that every year his dad would wistfully recall the Pack's last game played there in 2027. A bittersweet loss to the Southern California Chargers that season denied Green Bay a spot in the Global American Football League Intercontinental Play-offs. Matt and Chris viewed that game together from the highest upper deck seats. Tickets to the hugely anticipated final Packer game at Lambeau Field were an early high school graduation gift to Matt. They had cost Chris a month's salary from his job at the Wisconsin Hydroponics dairy and food processing plant where Matt also worked for the time being.

On this Saturday, Super Bowl revelers packed the streets donned in light winter wear. Visitors from warmer climates walked Lombardi Avenue at a slightly faster gait. They wore extra layers of heat-retaining fabrics.

With the rare traffic tie-up created by pregame hubbub, Matt regretted having not left his car outside the Green Bay downtown area. He could have taken Maglev rail to New Lambeau station. The thought had crossed his mind. Then he remembered the local transit system this week had started beaming his likeness over the on-board video advertising loops. He was not yet accustomed to complete strangers recognizing him.

In the privacy of his Vista, Matt could listen to the Global Sports Network Super Saturday preview show uninterrupted. The voices of the Global American Football League (GAFL) coverage team, Santiago Hernandez, Monica Lockhart, and Patrick Willis filled the vehicle's cabin. Matt directed his car towards a parking zone reserved for media, just off South Oneida Street. He was due on the air in twenty-five minutes, then again in an hour and half.

As his global positioning scanner locked onto an open parking space, Matt released the steering wheel to auto drive. He listened intently to the audiocast resonating in his car with stunning in-person clarity. If he had been carrying backseat passengers, the surrounding video feed would also be available albeit, in two dimensions.

Most state legislatures had outlawed front passenger in-car video technology by 2020. That did not stop some drivers from illegally reactivating older model vehicles and attempting to divide attention between the road and the in-car entertainment. A violation for driving while visually distracted would cost first-time offenders a seven-year operator license suspension.

Repeat DVD offenders received a lifetime driving ban and spent a mandatory one year in a minimum-security technology rehabilitation facility. These special centers banned all consumer electronic devices. Detainees entered into a rigorous program of human interaction exercises in preparation for returning to society. Tech abuse, an inability to separate one self from personal media devices, was pervasive in modern North American society. Medical professionals widely recognized the condition as a treatable illness.

Matt edged his way across the nearly full parking zone scanning for an open space. On the audiocast, Santiago Hernandez, a long-time World Cup soccer broadcaster who made the transition to American football coverage five years earlier, addressed Patrick Willis. Willis, a senior GAFL analyst and Hall of Fame inductee, was once a defensive standout with San Francisco.

“Patrick, let's talk for a minute about one of these teams playing tomorrow, the Petrobras Brazil Oilers. You played in the league for thirteen years. You made some of the early long-haul road games when American teams marketed the game in London, Frankfurt, and Shanghai. What are the biggest changes as far as preparation and travel for a ball game like this?”

“Santiago, for the Oilers, this game is easier to get ready for today than it would have been twenty, or even ten years ago. Look, when I came to the 49ers way back in 2007 ...”

“Waaay back,” Monica, the third commentator, interjected.

“Thanks for the reminder, Monica”

“Any time my friend.”

Monica Lockhart, like other forerunning female football commentators—Phyllis George, Pam Oliver, and Tina Wu—possessed the supermodel good looks that aided Global Sports Network's ratings. However, the former European Union gold medalist soccer star and kickboxing world champion brought more than eye candy to the job.

She was a much sought-after, place kicking consultant for several GAFL teams. Lockhart was an avid student of biomechanics. She once kicked a sixty-seven yard, undefended field goal in a skills exhibition event. She was a league insider. After her playful jab, she yielded back to Willis and he resumed.

“In my rookie year, there were plenty of guys still on that 49er squad that played the first NFL regular season game played outside the U.S. That Mexico City game in 2005 was a big deal then. They put the game ball in the Hall of Fame. Hey, it was nice to help export American football in season but the old subspace plane travel took a lot out of you. Long-distance flights did not get players revved up. Sure, it was a novelty playing in foreign cities back then and kind of a distraction too.”

“If I know my history, the 49ers lost that historic Mexico City game to the Arizona Cardinals,” Hernandez reminded his colleague.

“Now don’t go hanging that one on me, Santiago. I was still in college, remember?” Willis chuckled.

“I don’t remember, but go on,” Hernandez bantered back to the senior analyst.

“Thank you. I think I will, Santiago,” Willis continued. “Look, you got an hour and half from Sao Paulo, Brazil to Chicago on the space jet and a quick commuter flight hop here to Green Bay. Petrobras Brazil got here five days ago. You talk about no home field advantage in the Super Bowl. Here you might not even have home *nation* advantage. There was a big Brazilian fan base already here in Green Bay waiting for the Oilers at the airport. They really made the team feel welcome all week. I think that helped keep them loose.”

Monica chimed in again.

“I have to agree, Patrick. About a decade ago, biofuel research and international agricultural agreements first drew Brazilians in large numbers to Wisconsin. There are tons of youth soccer leagues in the area as a result, but this week, with a Brazilian team in the Super Bowl, you’ve got recent immigrants and visitors from the south embracing American football in Green Bay.”

Although the entertaining, informative broadcast team worked seamlessly together, their job security was uncertain. The network deal with the Global American Football League would expire in another year. The league was actively considering other options including taking a larger ownership stake in pregame and post-game programming. The GAFL already controlled all in game sponsorships. The Global Sports Network (GSN) was fighting to maintain both relevancy and ratings.

The U.N. allocated over twelve thousand satellite world band channels that delivered content in more than a hundred languages to about sixty-one percent of the world’s population. Household penetration in two hundred and twelve nations exceeded eighty percent. As access and choice expanded, opportunities for mass marketing shrank. Without content of worldwide interest to drive a mass audience, GSN could easily splinter and end up sold off in pieces to smaller regional or local competitors. Indirect competition to GSN’s supremacy also existed in the form of people like Matt Rodgers.

A production assistant led Matt to a seat in the GSN guest room. Inside the temporarily leased studio facility on the second floor of a New Lombardi Avenue office complex, Matt waited patiently for his interview. He gazed over at a monitor where he could see Santiago Hernandez in dual view both on screen and live through the open entryway to the main set. The technology advanced to the point where the live and broadcast images were virtually indistinguishable.

Hernandez was fluent in five languages. His face was one of the most recognized in the world. On screen, images of dozens of game highlights and corporate brand logos swirled and flew behind him. There were also moving and still shots from around the Green Bay area including the sparkling Lambeau Dome that held 115,132 seats. Hernandez teased the next segment.

“Coming up on GSN Super Saturday, presented by Lenovo, we’ll chat with Matt Rodgers. He is a lifetime, local resident and Krafton Green Bay Packers fan. His weekly macrocast *Matt’s Pack* originates from Vince’s Ultra Sports Lounge here in Green Bay and regularly gets over three million live downloads, mostly in North Central America. Those numbers are up about threefold this weekend with GAFL fans from every corner of the earth checking in for Matt’s uniquely Green Bay perspective as Super Bowl LXXII comes to this historic football town. We will check in with Matt in just a bit. First, GSN looks back with Jet Express on another historic moment involving a late great Super Bowl hero and some of tomorrow’s participants.”

There was a time when what followed on 58.3 million multimedia receivers tuned worldwide would have been called a commercial break. The material would have been an open invitation to switch channels, pause the broadcast, or take a walk from the home media room to the rest room. Instead, the measured Global Sports Network audience barely dropped at all during the advertiser’s feature story that Hernandez introduced.

The paid segment was part documentary on the 2023 Super Bowl matchup between the New York Jets and London Royals. The piece also served as a slick message for Jet Express airlines and engineering giant Astrox. Together Jet Express and Astrox constituted the Official Air Transport partners of the Global American Football League. Communicating such an association to fans no longer relied on traditional commercials. In fact, the classic, commercially supported media model of linear movement from content to short-form commercial had all but evaporated by 2039.

Devices like TiVo had been a huge hit in the early part of the century. In the year 2014 alone, the now defunct three original major television networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS had estimated lost revenue of \$2.3 billion resulting from the digital skipping of advertising material. A commercial message divorced from informational and entertainment programming became increasingly arcane and ineffective. Consumers, aided by user-friendly devices, took control of the remote to customize their media experience. As a result, global advertisers and their ad placement agents eventually demanded a new paradigm.

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, the Nielson and Arbitron ratings services tracked a small statistical sample of viewer and listener volunteers to measure radio and TV usage. Households received awkward paper diaries or a monitoring box on their TV sets. Those surveys and early devices gave way to what programming content providers, advertisers, and electronics manufacturers now called *active tagged monitoring*.

Essentially, manufacturers embedded radio frequency and biometric identifiers into every media device built to receive or play entertainment content. The technology existed in small portable satellite audio receivers, digital writing pens, and in room-sized, 3D high definition immersion suites.

The tracking capability of these identifiers meant no more guesswork or surveys were need to statistically estimate viewing and listening. Programmers and advertisers collected instantly precise data from the tracking technology hardwired into every consumer’s media device.

In North America at least, users could disable and opt out of these tracking features to remain anonymous consumers of media content. Ratings reports logged such persons as *AU* or an *active unidentified* audience. Fully eighty-three percent of Americans currently chose to leave the identity tracking capability active in their media receivers. There were powerful economic incentives for them to relinquish, and in effect sell, their personal privacy.

Product discounts, exclusive consumer entitlements tied to purchasing habits, and a large number of random cash giveaways awaited any fully activated user. There were no cumbersome entry forms to fill out. Actively tracked listeners and viewers generally saved five to seven percent off a typical grocery bill by sweeping their interfacers at the checkout lane. Leaving your device's tracking capability active meant you might possibly find an extra few hundred dollars deposited in your banking account. Billions of dollars once earmarked by corporations for advertising in mass media now targeted consumers with a form of high-tech bribery.

An interfacers without privacy controls might announce a user message like this one.

Congratulations, client number 0004287751214 residing at 2275 University Ave., Green Bay. Thank you for watching Marathon's Wildlife Adventure on Animal Planet last night. Don't miss next week's download available on demand in seven hours and forty-two minutes. Universal Interfacers Rewards has deposited your choice of one hundred Marathon dollars or fifty universal dollars to your account.

Universal Interfacers Rewards made every electronic purchase a potential winning lottery ticket. Banks, retailers, and manufacturers collaborated to put a small percentage of every interfacers funds transaction back into a collective, randomly awarded prize pool. Anyone with an identified interfacers could receive a random reward for any purchase made at any place where money electronically changed hands, like a grocery store, a charging station, or at Vince's Ultra Sports Lounge where Matt's dad, Chris, now anticipated his son's guest appearance on one of the 3D High Def cube monitors. In about an hour, his son would come to Vince's for the final edition of *Matt's Pack* Super Saturday macrocast. Macrocasts were emerging as a powerful and potentially revolutionary mode of mass communication.

Chris sipped a Great Lakes nonalcoholic lager and took in The Jet Express feature story on GSN.

An image of a wedge-shaped passenger aircraft bearing the Jet Express logo hovered over Chris inside a two hundred cubic foot box suspended from the ceiling. The device was the new Sony Volumetric Vision 2. It provided a remarkable multi-angle, three-dimensional perspective. The physicist, Dr. Parvis Soltan, envisioned volumetric imaging technology in the late twentieth-century. His early tests yielded crude, three-dimensional shapes of colored light. Forty years later volumetric images were eerily lifelike.

Inside the cube, a solemn narrative and gentle music accompanied the image of an eighty-year-old Joe Namath as he emerged from the Jets' team plane.

The date was August 26, 2023. Football fans in London received 'Broadway Joe' on this trip a bit like America welcomed the iconic English rock band "The Beatles" on their first trip to New York during Namath's playing days.

Namath waved and gingerly descended the ceremonial stair flight that had been wheeled up to the Astrox 1000E on the extended supersonic runway at London's Heathrow Airport. The side panel of the craft read *New York Jet Express GAFL Inaugural Space Flight*.

Namath arrived in London with his former team for the opening of the 2023 Global American Football League season. Joe led the Jets to a stunning upset of Baltimore over fifty years ago in Super Bowl III. He was now an honored guest for a historic road game. The eighth meeting between the New York and London franchises marked the first time a professional football team arrived for game day via space transport plane.

Now the image of Namath tossing the coin at Wembley Stadium's fifty-yard line dissolved to a view of the Astrox 1000E in orbital flight that had been taken from one of three international space stations.

Speeds exceeded Mach nine for the one-hour-and-fifteen-minute journey from New York to London. Passengers included fifty-three players, nine coaches, three trainers, two team doctors, a sports psychologist, eight team executives, New York City's mayor, the state's two Senators and the Jets' Hall of Fame quarterback. Also on board, Astrox Corporation president, Dr. Ajay Kothari and Jet Express founder and chief executive, Donald Neelton. Neelton collaborated with the late Richard Branson to expand commercial space flight. Namath, along with the 2023 New York Jet Express players, spent about twenty minutes in low-earth orbit to become the first American football team in space.

"Namath was just a Jet," Chris muttered to his wife Geri. "And he never wore a *blue* uniform with some company logo on the helmet."

"Get over it, Chris." Geri sighed. "You were in diapers when the guy retired. Besides, how do think we got that gorgeous new stadium down the street? Who has that kind of money in Green Bay? Someone has to pay for it. Might as well be a sponsor.

"Two and half billion to replace a perfectly good stadium we could have renovated for half that. Gave away our team's name is what we did!" Chris snorted as he took another sip of his lager.

"But not the *soul*, dear," Geri replied softly. You know it's always going to be the *Green Bay Packers*."

Chris ran his hand over the Krafton Green Bay Packers cheesehead hat he would wear at Lambeau Dome tomorrow. The odd fan headwear was part of Packers history. Krafton had grafted its brand onto the long Packer tradition. One side of the Green Bay helmet bore the familiar *G* logo while the other displayed the logo of its corporate sponsor.

In 2023, the New York Jet Blue had become the first GAFL franchise to attach a brand name to a team name. The Jet Blue deal with the league allowed all thirty-eight teams to move easily and freely between game cities on six continents. The airline took majority ownership of the New York Jet Blue. Astrox assumed a twenty-five percent share. It was a pioneering agreement. Making global games practical required a modern transportation solution to cut travel time. The Namath space flight ushered in an era of regularly scheduled intercontinental play. The aviation technology advanced the globalization of sport much in the same way earlier forms of air travel had made baseball's expansion to the West Coast of North America possible.

For the league, the move was critical and necessary given the economic realities of globalization. Other financial considerations for the GAFL and former NFL included modern stadium construction costs and player compensation. The players' stake in all team revenues included stock in the parent companies that owned GAFL franchises.

The days of floating municipal bonds and half-cent sales tax hikes to build giant sports venues were long gone. Cities had too many other pressing social needs to spend tax money on playing games. Nevertheless, if corporations were to foot the construction tab for state-of-the-art stadiums, a name on the side of a building alone would not suffice.

Retrofitting Jet Blue Stadium in 2024 hinged on the company smartly integrating the brand name into the identity of the former New York Jets. League officials already considered the existing building, barely fourteen years old, lacking in technical amenities. Although the standard practice of naming the corporation's team faced several hurdles and slow acceptance by the fans, the deals were the logical extensions of ceding the stadium's name.

The trailblazing stadium naming agreements first appeared at the college level as early as 1980 when Syracuse University replaced the aging Archbold stadium with the Carrier Dome. Five years later, the Sacramento Kings' Arco Arena opened the major professional sports floodgate to sponsored stadium naming.

A few years after the turn of the century, other sports franchises began to incorporate sponsors into their team names. Pro football resisted the trend for years. Once the sacrosanct seal was broken, other big companies rushed in throughout the 2020s.

Some corporations found natural connections to existing team names. Southern California Edison, a utility flush with cash from profitable investment in offshore tidal power generation, purchased the struggling Los Angeles Chargers in 2026. The company footed a multibillion-dollar stadium project between San Diego and Los Angeles after the devastating earthquake of 2025. The restructured team ownership group rechristened the squad as the Southern California Edison Chargers.

Media companies sniffing out opportunities to secure or consolidate broadcast rights led to the creation of the BBC London Royals and the Comcast Philadelphia Eagles. Banking interests jumped in with the Fidelity New England Patriots and the UBS Zurich Titans. Booming Pacific Rim economies welcomed the Sony Tokyo Dragons, the Toyota Sydney Outback, the McDonalds Beijing Tigers, the Lenovo Xiamen Egrets, and the Dole Honolulu Surf.

Domestic contraction accompanied the global expansion of American football. A few U.S. franchises, including those in Buffalo and Oakland, simply folded under the assorted pressures of declining local conditions, regional competition, or facilities costs. Global climate change toppled the New Orleans Saints and Miami Dolphins as viable franchises. The inland retreat and outright evacuation of entire stretches of former population centers literally wiped these businesses off the map. A 2007 *Sports Illustrated* cover depicting a computer-generated image of a Florida Marlins player waist deep in a flooded ballpark had proved prophetic.

A controversial move in 2018 added American-based NFL franchises and reclassified a number of successful, established teams. Clubs lacking the optimum combination of a marquee home city, heritage, merchandising appeal, or corporate naming sponsor became part of a new league remodeled from the original. Teams in this league would not be regularly included in overseas play.

The new U.S. National Football League (USNFL) featured twenty-four teams including among others, the Minnesota Vikings, Detroit Lions, Jacksonville Jaguars, Houston Texans, Kansas City Chiefs, Carolina Panthers, and Cincinnati Bengals. Many fans in cities that had been

passed over for international export were bitter. They perceived the snub relegated them to second-class status. The truth was that a complex, and at times subjective, calculus of population, facilities, corporate sponsorship interests, and worldwide marketability factored these franchises out of the new global league. A wild card GAFL play-off slot reserved for the top USNFL team mollified some bruised egos. The jointly governed USNFL and GAFL reached consensus on reinventing the annual Pro Bowl game. USNFL All Stars would take on the newly crowned GAFL Super Bowl champion.

For all the disruption, acrimony, and compromise, new teams from Oklahoma City, Salt Lake City, Sacramento, Boise, Albuquerque, and other emerging markets eagerly welcomed the relatively lower cost of entry into the new domestic-only NFL. Franchises funded renovation upgrades to some existing collegiate stadiums in USNFL markets. The remade league fed talent upward to the GAFL. New regional rivalries emerged.

The decoupling and expansion of the game came with significant growing pains including a labor dispute resulting in the cancellation of the entire 2022 season. For all the unfolding organizational change in pro football, sports coverage and the fan experience evolved even more rapidly. Matt Rodgers' creative use of the new technology represented part of the shifting fan relationship with the game.

Back at the GSN studio as the New York Jet Blue feature wound down, Santiago, Monica, and Patrick eased back in their ergonomically fitted, temperature-controlled chairs. Matt entered the set for the segment to follow. He exchanged greetings and pleasantries with the GSN team members, each of whom collected an annual salary in the eight figures. For now, Matt was a twenty-nine-year-old bachelor just getting by as a lab technician. While not the least bit star struck over the present company, Matt was in awe of the two Super Bowl championship rings on Willis' beefy hand.

As he settled into a guest chair, Matt imagined how his late grandfather would have been far more impressed by the moment. Back in Grandpa's day, an appearance of any kind on broadcast television or radio was a big deal owing largely to fewer outlets. In about forty seconds, 42.1 million video and 17.4 million audio devices would broadcast Matt's comments. He was not intimidated in part because the media playing field had been leveling out for decades. Now anyone with a cheap broadband transmission camera and programmer's kit could at least, theoretically, get a decent show out to anyone on the planet with little financial backing or technical expertise.

Hierarchical movie studios, record labels, and other large content producers no longer could maintain or even justify distribution monopolies. Large segments of the consumer entertainment market yielded to freelancers, free agents, free markets, and ultimately anyone who could attract an audience using the affordable, available technology. Getting anyone to tune in was still a matter of producing compelling content. While funny home videos no longer cut it as prime time television material, microcasts were a means to push such homemade material out faster from sender to more potential receivers.

Microcasting an event such as a wedding or child's birthday party to a few family members unable to attend in person was commonplace. In fact, up to several tens of thousands of people could theoretically watch a microcast at any given moment. To Matt, this limited capability was now as passé as posting clips back in the You Tube days.

A macrocast broke through any ceiling that restricted how many people could simultaneously see and hear rich audio and video content with interactive capability. The lines were never jammed. The server was never down. Responding to a click of one or one hundred

million interfacers, a single macrocaster could transmit content to an unlimited audience. The technology for home production with limitless, simultaneous access had been relatively exotic and expensive until recently. It had been commercially available for only the past year. A few experimental macrocasters were out there. Matt was perhaps the most well known. At the moment, Matt was not macrocasting. He was merely a guest on a standard global broadcast channel.

“There he is!” Matt’s mom, Geri, squeezed her husband’s hand and pointed to their son’s image suspended above them at the lounge.

Santiago Hernandez’s introduction was barely audible over huge cheers reverberating throughout the landmark local gathering spot.

“His regional macrocast, *Matt’s Pack ...*”

“MATT! MATT! MATT!” The throngs inside Green Bay’s favorite sports bar hoisted glasses and chanted for one of their own.

“... is considered by many to be the new fan voice of the Packer Nation.”

The chant dissipated into a general roar rising throughout the sea of green-and-yellow-clad lounge patrons. A bartender rushed over to a master control panel on the wall and adjusted the volume up.

“Matt Rodgers, welcome to GSN Super Saturday.”

“Thanks, Santiago.”

The lounge continued to buzz with excitement as the segment began.

“Shut up, so we can hear!” a burly man bellowed from one of the tables. The bar had run out of personal audio headsets.

“Matt tell us how this all got started,” Hernandez said.

“Well Santiago, my buddies and I have always been huge Packers fans. Sometimes we would save up some money to go to a game but mostly we watched from Vince’s UltraSports Lounge right down the street here.”

Cheers rose up again and glasses clinked from every corner of the lounge.

Seventy-year-old owner Vince Patterson whispered to himself as he picked up two empty glasses and waved a sanitizing rod over the bar. “Thanks, kid. *Again*”.

Of course, the name *Vince* was synonymous with legendary Green Bay coach Vince Lombardi. The Super Bowl trophy still bore his name. Vince Patterson’s dad grew up watching the young Bart Starr on a black and white screen. He named his only son after Lombardi and introduced him at an early age to the Packers’ players Brett Favre, Reggie White, and Donald Driver. Patterson’s father also gave his son a now priceless piece of Packers memorabilia, an original ticket stub dated January 15, 1967. It was from the NFL-AFL Championship Game, later known as Super Bowl I.

Before building his dining and drinking establishment, Vince Patterson painstakingly sought out Lombardi’s descendants. With their permission, he built the UltraSports Lounge as a tribute to a coach he knew only through grainy film and videotape. Vince’s business spiked dramatically thanks in part to a young man even farther removed from the Lombardi legend but still part of the Packers fan continuum. His image was looming larger than life from all ten strategically positioned viewing cubes in the lounge.

Matt was perfectly at ease on the air. He had told this story many times before.

“Vince pretty much kept a multimedia booth at the lounge reserved just for our crew every Sunday. That would be me and my buddies, Larry and Raul, and my gal Felice.”

As the crowd roared again, six arms raised up in gleeful unison from Matt's other studio, the best and most notable booth in the establishment. Matt's parents glanced across the crowded lounge and smiled as their eyes met those of their future daughter-in-law, Felice.

"So, four people talking sports in a bar? That's *Matt's Pack*?" Santiago asked.

"Well, the program participants who click in are really part of the Pack, but yeah, the four of us, we always loved to talk Packers football in the lounge, at work, on our interfacers. We plugged in to the league stat lines and fan cyberzines. We played in all the big Super X Cube fantasy tournaments. We started taking Larry's broadband camera to Vince's to interact with fans we knew in other cities. One thing led to another. When the compact iTower macrocaster came along, well, you know, there was no limit to how many people could click in to *Matt's Pack* at one time. We just started to macrocast from our little booth at Vince's before every game."

Patrick Willis jumped in.

"OK, so Matt, we know of other fans who microcast. Now iTower opens things up even more but you people really took it to another level. Tell us about that."

"Sure, Patrick, we live here in Green Bay. First, you have to realize this place is by far the smallest GAFL city in the world. To this day, fans in larger USNFL cities still resent the league taking the Packers global. Hey, I get it. We got special treatment for being Green Bay, a little town with a big football tradition."

"So how did that help the show?" Willis asked.

"What also makes Green Bay different, and really what made *Matt's Pack* possible, is the Packers team, the staff; they really are part of this town. They're not like distant celebrities. These people are practically our neighbors. They like it that way most of the time."

"So this small town gave you more access?"

"Sort of," Matt wanted to protect some inside sources affiliated with the Packers.

"When our audience was more limited, we invited trainers, assistant coaches, second-string guys, and so on, down to Vince's during the week to microcast with us. We aren't talking big stars, just people who were part of the organization. Vince would treat them to dinner. We would ask about crazy stuff like if they ate brats on the road trip to Frankfurt and were they as tasty as what you get here in Wisconsin."

"And you thought Packers fans would be interested in that?" Monica asked.

"Why not? The regular media has usually already asked and answered all the standard football questions. We figured the people that picked up the microcast wanted something a little different, a little more personal. We never went out and researched it or anything or even cared much about how many people clicked in. We just had fun being offbeat and keeping things genuine."

It occurred to Matt he had just referred to his hobby in the past tense. Soon the hobby would be a job.

Santiago responded to a GSN director's instructions coming over his tiny, invisible earpiece.

"Matt, let's take a look at a segment from your show. Tell us a bit about it."

Matt was lukewarm over the short piece GSN had elected to showcase, an August 2038 conversation with three Packers' recruits hoping to make final cuts at the end of preseason. When GSN first invited Matt to make the network appearance, he provided, on request, several short excerpts of *Matt's Pack*. The selected feature in Matt's opinion was the least edgy of the batch. He knew some of the other show samples he sent over to GSN would never get on. This

much was clear from earlier negotiations and a resulting agreement about to become public. Matt accepted these limits. Some friends and collaborators were having more difficulty with such boundaries.

“Come on, why didn’t GSN pick the show we did with Joey Freeland?” Larry scowled at the minicube positioned above his forehead as Matt’s three-dimensional likeness introduced the selected segment. “Now *that* was our best macrocast all year. It’s why Matt’s talking with these chumps right now.”

“There were 3.145 million real time viewers if I recall and a pile of post-show downloads,” Raul reminded Larry.

Raul was the *Matt’s Pack* numbers person who could recite stats and give them meaning in an instant.

Felice’s face crinkled into a half smirk, half frown. Her red, curly locks dipped as she leaned forward and peered at Larry across the booth table under the minicube displaying Matt’s image. Volumetric broadcasts made round table configurations more conducive to viewing an event. In some respects, it was a more intimate experience compared to viewers seated directly across from a flat screen.

“Be genuine, Larry,” Felice scoffed. “GSN doesn’t need to replay the Joey Freeland thing. Everyone has already seen it.”

Matt had yet to arrive, but his “Pack” was already warming up for today’s show as they recalled their most infamous show to date.

Packers’ wide receiver Joey Freeland was a flamboyant figure on the squad. The rising second-year star was not shy about telling the mainstream media, including GSN, how he enjoyed the spotlight, and incidentally, single life.

One week in late October, following the *GSN Tuesday Night Game of the Week*, Monica Lockhart interviewed Freeland on the sidelines at Lambeau Dome. The Packers had just dismantled the Apple New York Giants 43–7. After a solid but somewhat quiet rookie year in 2037, Freeland had just broken through on this night with his third straight one-hundred-yard-plus receiving game.

After dispensing with the usual Xs and Os stuff about his two touchdown receptions and the porous Giants’ defense, Lockhart tossed out a softball question for the wide receiver.

“Joey, it is six weeks into your second season. You really are becoming a household name. How are you handling all this sudden attention?”

Joey smiled broadly and scanned the emptying stadium as sweat dripped off his face. That face had earned him thirty-four million in new product endorsements over the past month.

“You know, you just try to take all that in stride, Monica.” Joey said, starting down a well-worn path taken in so many athlete interviews.

Then he gave the answer the uniquely Joey treatment.

“I got like a hundred microcast marriage proposals last week, so what are you gonna do except just stay focused on the job catchin’ balls and winnin’ games?”

“What about those marriage proposals, Joey?” Monica asked as the waning seconds allotted to the post-game interviews ticked off.

“Yeah, well I don’t think I’m ready to settle down. I’m a young guy just stayin’ free and easy.”

Monica wisely wrapped up the interview before Joey could ask her out on camera. She wished him luck on the Packers’ upcoming road trip to Southern California.

The interview was over less than five minutes before Raul, Larry, Felice, and Matt had pulled up about twenty of the Joey Freeland microcast marriage proposals on their interfacers. Others were either blocked or multiple user requests had maxed out the download pathways. Surely, Joey's remarks had set off the activity.

Microcasts were different in quality and depth from the old blogs, text messages, and jerky pixilated video files of the first World Wide Web. As media documents, microcast image and sound quality made early Web interactive tools appear as crude as Morse code telegraph signals.

The archived Joey Freeland marriage proposals now beamed across thousands of interfacers including those inside the *Matt's Pack* reserved booth at Vince's UltraSports Lounge. The matrimonial appeals ran the gamut from poignant and funny to sad and pathetic. Some were explicit. Others were charmingly innocent. All the original microcast proposals remained posted on Joey's public multimedia site with full consent of the senders. Joey was both a great athlete and a self-styled promoter keenly aware the files would be widely accessed and downloaded all week following the post-game interview with Monica Lockhart.

By Wednesday, Matt and his team managed to connect with four of the women and one man who had proposed to Freeland. They invited these admirers to come to Vince's for the show the next Saturday along with a Green Bay area psychologist, Dr. Sadhvi Saheli. What once might have taken several days of advance work by producers, publicists, and technical assistants trading calls, coming to terms regarding the questions, format, and link-ups from multiple studio locales was instead set up with ease in a few hours. These were, after all, less like formal media requests than invitations to participate conference-style in a linked community. Advanced technology easily facilitated voyeurs and exhibitionists alike in this expanding world of unscripted, unedited public conversation.

The five fans that *Matt's Pack* tracked down included an eighteen-year-old college freshman at the University of Wisconsin and a forty-three-year-old divorced mother of two from Milwaukee. One Freeland fanatic, a thirty-year-old receptionist and long-time Packers fan, Myra Tompkins, happened to weigh three hundred and twenty-seven pounds. She had Freeland by about sixty pounds. Another fan and husband-hunter was an already married woman who claimed her current spouse was fine with polygamy. The last of the Freeland Five was the gay owner of a spa salon in Chicago.

Felice sent a message to Freeland's public fan interface requesting Joey come on to *Matt's Pack* to talk live with the five guests. Surprisingly, she got an affirmative reply on Thursday when her interfacer flashed a seven-second reply blocked message from the Packers receiver. She forwarded it to Matt, Larry, and Raul from her work cubicle at Bellevue Laser Imaging.

In the message, which Felice could playback but not respond to, Freeland appeared stretched out in his home media room. He quipped, "Hey, I know about you *Matt's Pack* guys. Brandon Francis turned me on to the show. Hell, I won't *marry* any of 'em but sure I'll talk to 'em. Three o'clock Saturday. Click me in!"

Brandon Francis was a Packers' trainer and semiregular at the UltraSports Lounge. He had been on *Matt's Pack* last season discussing his high altitude workouts with Freeland in Peru prior to the receiver's rookie year.

Theoretically, all Felice needed to do Saturday afternoon would be to press her finger to the freeze-framed image of Joey on the saved message. Freeland would then be clicked in.

Anyone and everyone logged onto *Matt's Pack* enhanced iTower macrocaster would be able to view and hear the unpredictable receiver.

None of this user-friendly technology meant Joey would actually deliver on the promise to be there at the appointed hour. Even if Felice could get Joey's private interfacer code, he would likely screen or block any return call attempt. Come Saturday, there might be a User Unavailable message. The crew hedged their bets, made no promises, and posted this interfacer message to their subscriber database.

Hey, Packer Nation: Next Saturday at 2000 GMT, 1500 Central U.S. click in to ww2 MattsPack. Meet some fans who want to marry wide receiver Joey Freeland. Will Joey show up to hear them propose again? Anything goes and anything can happen on Matt's Pack from Vince's UltraSports Lounge sponsored by Great Lakes Nonalcoholic Lager. Press here for automatic 10% worldwide savings on your next six-pack.

To her delight, on Saturday, precisely at three, Felice successfully clicked in Joey Freeland to nine hundred twenty-six thousand and twenty-two interfacers on standby. When his image popped up, he was sitting on a neatly made king-sized bed at his hotel room inside the Westin Bonaventure in downtown Los Angeles. The Packers were on the road for a game the following day.

On Joey's arm was an attractive, leggy woman he had just met at the lobby bar about an hour before. She was barefoot and wearing nothing but an oversized Packer jersey. It covered her decently enough but left plenty of room for speculation as to where her meeting with Joey was going or had just gone. Joey was fully clothed and looking dapper in a stylish European styled suit.

Freeland was immensely entertaining as he bantered with Matt's pack, Dr. Saheli, and five marriage-hungry fans that ranged from half serious to fully delusional. Throughout the conversation, Joey's own guest smiled but said nothing as she sat cross-legged and rubbed her toe over the neatly creased slacks of the ball player.

Matt tried unsuccessfully to identify the mystery woman with Freeland.

"Who's your friend, Joey?" he asked.

"Aw, she's shy. This is just me and you now," Joey replied. Matt did not press. It was remarkable enough Freeland actually clicked in. If Joey wanted a provocative but silent prop at his side, so be it. The mystery woman was apparently also content to remain anonymous.

Early in the macrocast, Freeland addressed his other five admirers sitting together in Green Bay as a group.

"Come on now, y'all. You don't really think Joey wants to get married?" Joey frequently referred to himself in third person. "Not with a seven-hundred-and fifty-million-dollar contract and more ladies than I can handle!" This guy made the playboy Namath look like a choirboy.

"We love you, Joey!" the salon owner called out.

"Hey, I recognize that voice from the microcast he sent to my site ww2 JoeysPlace. Is that Maurice?"

"It's me, honey!"

"Yo dude, it's great that you're a Packers fan even with bein' from Chicago and all. I love you too but not in that way if you get what I'm saying. No disrespect to you and your preferences now."

“Darn, Joey!” Maurice whined. “I’m still your biggest fan!” Obviously, Maurice loved the spotlight despite Freeland’s rejection. Later he would post a download link to the show replay on his salon interface site.

Matt sensed the show slipping quickly from his control. Myra Tompkins, the frighteningly obese receptionist, had been sobbing uncontrollably ever since Joey had clicked in and it became apparent he was already taken.

In speaking privately with Matt before the show, Felice speculated that the college freshman, Julia Petrini, was an entrepreneur looking for creative ways to pay for her six-figure student tuition. When Julia’s turn to talk with Joey came up, she took the opportunity to downgrade her original marriage proposal to a seductive request for a date.

“Julia, you do look cute from what I can see. But honestly, I think you might be an expensive date,” Joey said.

Somehow, Matt managed to keep the segment from rapidly deteriorating. He got all the guests involved, kept Joey amused, and with the aid of Dr. Saheli, he even managed to console the forlorn, unstable Tompkins. Matt had a knack for riding out and reigning in chaos while never fully taming an entertaining beast of his own creation.

Thanks to the unlimited user capability of the iTower macrocaster, over three million people logged in during the interview and the freewheeling round table chat. Eight million more direct downloads occurred in the next three days before Matt and Larry disabled the link. They did so mainly to appease and maintain good standing with a Packers’ media relations director who had quietly helped Matt get guests for many months. No Packers staff member had formally vetted the Freeland appearance. It hardly mattered now. The genie was out of the bottle.

Football fans and curious onlookers alike downloaded and widely shared the bizarre “Marry Me, Joey!” segment like an out-of-control virus. Almost every GAFL player and coach had seen the twelve minute clip by mid season. The guest psychologist, Dr. Saheli, used her newfound notoriety to build her practice counseling the celebrity obsessed as Matt, Felice, Larry, and Raul’s own local celebrity around Green Bay grew.

Two days after his October click-in appearance from the Westin, Packers’ management disciplined Joey Freeland with a three-hundred-thousand-dollar fine. It was a sum roughly equivalent to the uptick in Freeland replica jersey sales following the macrocast. The league added another hundred-thousand-dollar penalty a week later. The additional fine followed Joey celebrating in the end zone after a game-winning touchdown against the Coca-Cola Atlanta Falcons. After setting the ball down, he flashed three fingers to signify the original three-hundred-thousand-dollar sanction. Joey’s next gesture sent a shock of laughter and cheers through Vince’s UltraSports Lounge that Sunday. With arms outstretched cheerleader style for the GSN sideline camera, Joey formed an *M* followed by a *P* with his thumbs and forefingers. Millions of viewers by then knew the two letters stood for *Matt’s Pack*. Millions more who were not already aware of the macrocast, but curious about the cryptic hand signals Joey flashed, soon knew as well.

The Packers did not levy the original fine because of anything Freeland said during his appearance on *Matt’s Pack*. The young woman on the hotel bed, a former UCLA cheerleader and current exotic dancer in West Hollywood, prompted management to discipline Freeland. She had been wearing Joey’s number eighty-nine jersey. This exposed the Krafton logo clearly and in a manner unbecoming to the image of the Krafton Green Bay Packers organization. Though no one at Krafton would ever admit it, nothing about the segment hurt cheese sales, but the fine silenced would-be critics and distanced the parent company from the incident.

At another, much smaller company, Marty Estes, the Wisconsin regional sales manager at Great Lakes Lagers was ecstatic. At the start of the GAFL season, Estes and Vince Patterson had persuaded the regional brewery to sponsor an upgrade of *Matt's Pack*. Great Lakes picked up the thirty-seven-thousand-dollar cost of the macrocaster unit to expand the potential audience. The sum was a pittance relative to the twenty-six and a half million that companies would pay for each five seconds of interactive product placement during the GSN broadcast of Super Bowl LXXII.

Great Lakes Lagers attracted thousands of discount subscribers from the *Matt's Pack* macrocast. Tens of thousands more flooded in as the Freeland clips circulated on interfacers from Green Bay to Ghana. Beverage distributors from all over the planet wanted to know how to get the beer seen on *Matt's Pack* to their bar and restaurant clients.

Global Sports Network took notice of Matt's homespun popularity. The tenuous network relationship with Krafton and other team owners prevented a GSN rebroadcast of the mildly scandalous clip from the *Pack's* semiprofessional show.

GSN executives knew that retaining viewers and listeners was an uphill battle getting harder by the minute. The cost of macrocasters fell. The technology spread. The macrocaster was about to do for amateur microcasters what the printing press did for the town crier, namely, it would exponentially widen the distribution's potential. The network could use a person like Matt.

In effect, Global Sports Network was about to buy the popular program out. Today would be Matt's last macrocast as a truly independent entity. Santiago Hernandez was preparing to make the announcement as the relatively bland segment on the training camp hopefuls ended.

"There's a taste of *Matt's Pack* as they followed the fortunes of players on the bubble trying to make final cuts of the Packers' roster last August. Good stuff, Matt. Your crew spent time with some guys you just don't always hear about and got their stories."

Matt managed a half smile.

"Yeah, Santiago, we get around, you know."

After a pause that lingered, Monica Lockhart finally addressed the elephant in the room. Her post-game interview with Joey Freeland ultimately sparked the entire "Marry Me Joey!" wildfire. Off camera but on mike, she blurted, "I'll say you get around, Matt!"

Willis laughed heartily. Hernandez winced.

Anyone paying any attention at all for the past six months knew Lockhart was referring to the Freeland hotel incident. The GSN crew unanimously wanted to play the clip but had been overruled by skittish network executives.

As Felice had already reminded Larry, there was no point in replaying the segment anyway. By now "Marry Me, Joey!" was already stored on at least twenty million interfacers. It had put *Matt's Pack* on the map. It was the central reason he was getting a shot on the largest worldwide sports network. With the obvious already acknowledged by Lockhart, it was time for Santiago Hernandez to let the GSN audience in on Matt Rodgers' future before moving on.

"Wherever you got around before, Matt, I'm not going there now," Santiago declared.

"But we do want to let everyone know this. Matt Rodgers will be joining us as a regular GSN content contributor starting with the Super Bowl LXXII post-game wrap tomorrow. Thanks for being with us today, Matt. We'll look forward to seeing more of you in the future on GSN."

"Thank you, Santiago. I look forward to it."

Once off camera, Matt nodded to his future GSN colleagues and scurried out of the studio. He was a five-minute walk from Vince's and twenty minutes away from signing on to what would be the farewell macrocast of *Matt's Pack*.

Among other things, Matt conditioned his GSN employment on the right to a last informal macrocast before Super Bowl LXXII. The GSN deal would pay him enough to quit his day job at Wisconsin Hydroponics and start a nice foundation for him and Felice in their new life together. After today, Larry and Raul would keep independently macrocasting with a bit of financial support from Great Lakes Lagers and Vince Patterson. However, they would carry on without using the *Matt's Pack* name. That would be reserved for appearances Larry and Raul would make as guest contributors to Matt's new GSN on-demand content features.

The new material would be out of the box by network standards, but the freeform, anything goes feel of the original *Matt's Pack* would end just as it was catching on. Now the most devoted fans of the show knew it.

As the applause inside Vince's at the end of Matt's GSN appearance died down, Larry raised his interfacer to his lips and said, "Display subject line text responses."

Immediately the device showed a long list of brief voice recognition comments from *Matt's Pack* subscribers. These participants, listeners, and viewers formed the core audience of the show. The first response topping the list came from Larry and Matt's college town of Madison and simply read, "Sell Out!"

"Here they come," Larry said as he shook his head and stared at his interfacer.

The GSN announcement of Matt's new network contributor job had been brief. Many of the incoming messages were from fans seeking more information. A few were congratulatory.

Raul, Matt's lab coworker at Wisconsin Hydroponics, had taken it upon himself to access the audience research mode built into the iTower macrocaster. He had mastered most of the basics allowing him to compile instant interpretive data on *Matt's Pack's* subscriber demographics.

As part of the agreement to buy the macrocaster, Great Lakes Lagers insisted someone access information from the "Who's Clicking?" feature of the unit. Larry, Felice, and Matt had been largely indifferent about facts like how many twenty-one to thirty-four year old Marathon Charge 'N Go shoppers in Green Bay and surrounding counties downloaded "Marry Me, Joey!" Great Lakes Lagers took much greater interest in such data.

Raul frequently posted instant poll questions on various football topics to show subscribers. He posted a poll question the moment Matt's guest appearance got underway. "Would you like to see *Matt's Pack* on GSN?"

Yes, no, and maybe were the three possible responses. Raul tapped a small blue light at the corner of his interfacer for the latest results. His interfacer wirelessly networked to the three-foot-high macrocaster unit mounted in Vince Patterson's back office at the lounge.

Larry continued to scroll down his list of unsolicited audience feedback. *Matt's Pack* subscribers wanted to know what Matt's becoming a GSN content contributor meant for the quirky and popular independent macrocast. They would know soon enough. In about ten minutes, *Matt's Pack* "Big Game Preview" would sign on.

Raul set his interfacer down on the table and said to no one in particular, "Eighteen percent say they would watch Matt on GSN. Twenty-six percent say no. Fifty-six percent say maybe.

"I think 'maybe' really means they would give it chance and stick around if the show didn't change much," Felice said as she flipped through a rare paper copy of the Super Bowl

LXXII official game program. The GAFL digitally distributed most of the commemorative programs.

Larry was still scrolling on his touch screen. His eyes shifted sideways in Felice's direction for a moment.

"It already has changed, Felice," he said and returned his attention to the tiny screen.

Global Sports Network was the product of major corporate backed media. In the interest of importing and growing Matt's existing audience, they would give him some creative reign to cover the GAFL from an average fan perspective. As a GSN correspondent, he would certainly have to trade some editorial freedom he enjoyed as a pioneering successful macrocaster.

Larry raised a glass and made a toast.

"Well, we got one last gasp together from the old round table. Let's have fun like we used to when it was just the four of us talking Packers football."

"To the Pack!" Raul and Felice answered in unison and bumped water glasses. Beer would flow later after their work was finished.

Nearly two years ago to the day, *Matt's Pack* first opened up their game day bull sessions from this very table using a small, interactive broadband camera. They could accommodate a maximum of two hundred people logged in at one time. They clicked in participants using an awkward miniature keyboard with an attachment resembling an old gaming joystick.

The booth technically was still the same space where they had always ordered up brats and fries from Vince's kitchen. Now it was also a glass-enclosed and partially soundproofed bubble. The space had become a near overnight local legend. Lounge patrons could peer into the bubble booth like a display window at a shopping mall, or as Larry sometimes joked, a fish bowl.

This football season, the converted booth was also reserved, prime customer space with a long waiting list. Many Packers fans made it a point to dine at Vince's in the *Matt's Pack* booth when it was not in use for the weekly macrocast. While the makeshift space lacked some of the bells and whistles in a GSN mobile broadcast center, the audiovisual capabilities of this part-time studio were impressive by any standard.

Larry's day job at a local electronics store proved the perfect connection for outfitting the show with the latest gadgetry. For the macrocasts, Larry converted the volumetric cube over the *Pack's* booth to a four-paneled, two-dimensional graphics display. The screens were not quite as sophisticated as purely professional media toys. However, they were well suited for illustration of spoken points, stat tables display, and visual click-in of subscriber participants for comment and interaction. Raul proficiently multitasked and controlled these screen displays throughout the show.

Felice managed a rolling racetrack of sorts that circled three hundred degrees around the booth. Four small, high-resolution cameras, each no bigger than a dime, could whiz along the metal track via remote command. This feature gave viewers a sense of hovering around the table as discussion progressed.

Audio-only listeners got full, crisp sound on any interfacer or media device through a digital subchannel. These channels were widely available and registered much like an old Internet domain name. The video portion of macrocast files appeared in a two-dimensional, flat-panel format but iTower was working on a volumetric upgrade. Three-dimensional special effects remained one of the few competitive edges GSN and other major media outlets could still claim over macrocast technology. As far as the human personality factor, the polished programming style at the corporately owned networks and subchannels generally had less edge and greater predictability than amateur macrocaster content.

Matt dashed from the street outside and through the automatic, sliding, double-glass doors into the lounge entryway. A second set of doors just beyond led to the airy lounge where his second show of the day would sign on in minutes. Matt had a guest with him. The owner greeted both warmly in the lobby wearing his trademark immaculate white zipper-up shirt with decorative collar buttons. On the shirt breast pocket was the embroidered script *Vince* in green and gold stitching. Vince Patterson was the consummate, distinguished host nearly as beloved in Green Bay as the iconic late Coach Lombardi himself.

“Hey, Matt!” Vince beamed as he reached out one hand to shake and placed his other firmly on Matt’s shoulder. At seventy, Vince still had a formidable grip. “Great show on GSN! We’re keeping your old seat warm for you here.”

“Thanks, Vince. We’re on in about six minutes but I want you to meet my guest.” Matt turned to the man standing next to him. He had just met him the day prior in the Super Bowl media village.

“Wait!” Vince squinted at the visitor before Matt could utter his name. “I’ve seen you before. Didn’t you used to have a show on the old ESPN?”

The man, a couple of years Vince’s senior, flashed a smile and played along by remaining silent and raising his eyebrows to coax a guess. Vince tapped his forehead as if to download a distant memory.

Matt, with his keen sense of sports broadcasting history savored the moment as Vince racked his brain.

“Rome!” Vince pointed at the man with a sudden certainty.

“You’re Jim Rome! Why, I used to listen to your show on AM radio back when I was still driving a beer truck!”

“Thanks for remembering, Vince.” Jim laughed as he reached out and shook his hand. “I hate being a walking trivia question especially if I’m the only one with the right answer.”

“Well, it’s a fine pleasure to have you here, Jim.”

Jim Rome had not been on the air regularly for about fifteen years. He signed off in 2024 from his long-running television show, *The Last Word*, on Fox Global before it merged with GSN. Enthusiasts could still download Rome’s classic radio broadcasts of *The Jungle* from 1996 through 2016 on NATI, the Nostalgia Audio Talk Interface channel or “Natty” as it was commonly known.

The Jungle radio show featured colorful guest callers who carried themselves with a mix of bravado and sarcasm. They railed about sports news topics unfolding on and off the field. Media historians later credited the show as a breakthrough in interactive, participatory broadcasting rights along with the politically oriented talk radio of the era. Rome gave callers the chance to creatively rant, analyze, and argue their way to low-profile radio stardom, a redundant characterization perhaps. A couple of regular *Jungle* callers even landed their own radio programs on local affiliate stations.

Jim Rome imposed two primary caller ground rules. Offer defensible opinions. Do not torture listeners by being hesitant or boring. Rome summarized the requirements in his oft-repeated mantra, Have a Take and Don’t Suck.

Rome also regularly encouraged and incorporated electronic mail and text interaction in his programs. These communication forms had become as outmoded as Morse code or HTML language but for the times reflected the cutting edge of technology. Today, Rome was retired, but as an admitted tech gadget junkie, he was dabbling in macrocasting as a hobby from his Southern California villa.

Much of the wide-open spirit of *Matt's Pack* thrived originally in *The Jungle*. When Matt saw Rome on media row catching up with colleagues and former players, he introduced himself. He did not have to ask Jim twice to come on today's farewell show. Jim had seen "Marry Me, Joey!" and checked out several *Matt's Pack* macrocasts in recent months.

"I know you have to get over to the booth," Vince said as he whisked Jim and Matt through the entryway. "But quick, let me show you something, Jim." Matt knew Vince wanted to show off his special relic of a game all three of them were too young to have experienced first hand. Tourists had been streaming through Vince's all week. Most everyone stopped to gaze at the historical display case.

"Look there, Jim." He pointed through the thick security glass of the case towards a mint condition ticket.

Rome peered down through the photos, game balls, and other memorabilia.

"Yup, I would have been ... two years old!" Jim said as he spotted the stub and read from it.

"WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP AFL-NFL, January 15, 1967, Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Matt, I bet you know the price of admission without looking at this thing."

"Twelve dollars," Matt answered without hesitation.

"Good call," Jim said. He was pleased with Matt's command of Super Bowl history but not finished quizzing him.

"Final score?"

"I better know it!" Matt huffed. "Green Bay Packers 35, Kansas City Chiefs 10. Bart Starr MVP. Sixteen of twenty-three for two hundred and fifty yards. Winning player's share: fifteen grand, about half the cost of our little macrocaster we're gonna fire up in about three minutes."

"Let's do it!" Jim said as he and Matt passed through the next set of sliding glass doors and into the main lounge with Vince trailing close behind.

"There he is! Ready for the *Pack*!" One of Matt's coworkers from the plant hollered and held out a hand for Matt to grasp. Applause and shouts of encouragement rose up as Matt and Jim navigated through the crowded, gleaming room filled with comfortable padded booths, recessed conversation pits, digital virtual billiards flats, and sleek chrome and acrylic fixtures.

"Who's the guy with Matt?" one of the younger patrons asked Vince.

"Didn't you see the show's promo on your interfacer?" Vince gleefully answered. He loved the rare chance to be faster on his feet than a tech-savvy kid. Vince put a hand on the customer's shoulder and pointed towards Jim. "That guy is a legend. Maybe Matt will be one someday too."

With ninety seconds to sign on, Matt slid open the clear, specially built entry door and led Jim into the bubble booth. It certainly was like being in a fish bowl.

"Hey, everyone thanks for waiting." Matt said to the assembled group closing the transparent door behind him and muffling the lounge chatter from outside.

"Cutting it close, GSN big shot," Larry cracked.

"Yeah, yeah. Sorry." Matt slid past Larry and pecked Felice on the cheek.

Felice squeezed Matt's hand under the table.

"We're ready. Are you?" Felice asked.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Matt said under his breath before his gaze shifted to collect those of the others around the table.

“Hey, Felice, Larry, Raul, meet Jim Rome. I know it’s a quick introduction but I think you all know his work.”

“Seventy seconds.” Raul looked up from his interfacers. “Nice to meet you Mr. Rome.”

“It’s just Jim, please. You all don’t want to be reminding me I’m the old guy!”

“OK, Jim.” Raul continued and turned to Matt. “We’ve got all the stats lines and graphics loaded and ready to click in whatever’s out there.” Raul had become the team member responsible for the pacing and flow of the macrocast.

“No screeners, eh?” Jim noted.

The professional media outlets all employed staff members who screened the participants for this kind of interactive format. It reduced the possibility of crackpots or participants who might ask irrelevant questions getting on the show. Meticulous call screening made for a much more controlled environment that sponsors and shareholders preferred. Macrocasting was still interaction without a net. The crew had the use of a seven-second delay to dump inbound obscenities or downright idiocy. Otherwise, what they clicked is what they got. It could be a knowledgeable Bears fan clicked in from Chicago or Joey Freeland lounging on his hotel bed with a stripper.

“No screeners, Jim. It really is a *Jungle* out there.” Larry said as he looked over his shoulder through the other side of the bubble. He waved to a couple of Brazilian fans from Sao Paulo on the other side of the glass who were wearing Oilers jerseys. “Love your old shows on Natty, by the way.”

“Thanks, Larry. I should click you guys in from L.A. on my macrocast next week.”

“Careful, we’ll hold you to that, Jim.”

“Fifteen seconds,” Raul took one last look at the bookmarked cues he had programmed into the interfacers. Back in Vince’s office behind the main bar, the macrocaster beeped. A four-inch rod rose from the top of the unit. The entire device was a bit smaller than a typical suitcase but packed digital computing and two-way communications capabilities equal to NASA’s first space shuttle.

In five seconds, the macrocaster would relay a signal out to over ten million waiting interfacers. The original *Matt’s Pack* would go out with its largest real-time audience ever. The GSN guest slot less than an hour earlier sparked interest and more than tripled Matt’s subscriber count. Not bad for a two-dimensional, flat-panel macrocast from a local sports bar. Many producers of corporately financed entertainment programs would long for such numbers given the fragmented array of consumer choices.

Raul raised a finger and gave a final signal for the opening of the show.

“*Matt’s Pack* Big Game Preview. Cue ... now!”

The cube positioned over the table lit up in an array of flashing sound and motion. A high-energy instrumental theme song created by a local Green Bay electrorock band accompanied Matt’s preloaded voiceover that rolled through the macrocaster.

“*From beautiful Downtown Green Bay, home of the greatest football fans in America.*”

A rapid succession of metropolitan aerial views of Green Bay shot across the digital flat panels. Images of Packers’ fans waving from Lombardi Avenue as they streamed into Lambeau Dome for a regular season contest followed.

“*It’s anything goes fan blasts you won’t get on the same old subchannels your mama and daddy watched the game on.*”

Exterior and interior shots of Vince’s UltraSports Lounge flashed on screen. The show’s opening segment included rapid-fire images depicting the amateur macrocaster team. The shots

zipped and spun across the screen. There was Larry animatedly arguing a point, Felice laughing and applauding, Raul gesturing in amused disbelief and finally Matt, throwing up his arms as if to say "what hath I wrought?"

"Right here in Vince's UltraSports Lounge courtesy of the new iTower macrocaster and Great Lakes Non Alcoholic Lager."

For the next five seconds, all interfacers logged onto the program displayed a small green light in the corner of the screen while the program introduction rolled on. Users could simply touch that light and receive an automatic interface-activated discount on Great Lakes Nonalcoholic Lager wherever it was sold. Over a hundred and twenty thousand users did just that before the light faded out.

"It's Matt's Pack!"

Suddenly the recorded slick intro just dropped out. The peppy music ceased in midstride and there was Matt live, looking squarely at the screen. The entire, high-gloss introduction was a parody designed to contrast with the more authentic sense of the actual show. While supporting gadgetry and graphics would still appear throughout the macrocast, this abrupt nontransition was a signature element of *Matt's Pack*. It reminded subscribers that even with a small sponsor no one really owned the ragged, spontaneous bar room conversation, at least not until after this final edition.

"Hi, thanks for clicking on *Matt's Pack*. Before we get it going today on this incredible day before Super Bowl LXXII, I want to explain something."

There were no smoothly polished scripts or director cue cards. This was just Matt doing his best to answer the question on the minds of long time subscribers. Namely, why are you signing on with the colossal machine of Global Sports Network?

Matt caught himself. All that could wait. He wanted to have fun with his last independent show.

"Aw, forget it. I promise I will get to the GSN thing later. Right now we've got our own thing to do."

About a hundred and fifty of the thousand or so participants requesting to click in and get on the macrocast live feed dropped off. There was a good chance some of the dropped connections were from semihostile participants ready to grill Matt over his selling out.

"It's Super Bowl Saturday and the pack is keeping spirits up even though our home team isn't playing tomorrow. Tomorrow, the New York Jet Blue and the Petrobras Brazil Oilers square up in Green Bay for Super Bowl LXXII. Raul, what are big numbers for this game?"

Felice tapped her interfacer and a camera swung along the circular rail and stopped opposite of Raul.

"Three numbers, Matt. Twenty one ..."

A large blue numeral *21* flashed onto the panel over Raul as he pointed a finger upwards and ran commentary. "The New York Jet Blue is trying to make history and be the first GAFL, USNFL, or original NFL team to ever go 21-0".

"Next number is one hundred ten thousand one hundred and nine. Raul wagged a second finger. The screen changed to an image of Lambeau Dome.

"That's how many fans will be inside that stadium tomorrow and we've got a few of them right here with us today." Fans raucously yelled from behind the bubble. Some displayed their shiny, digitally encrypted game tickets hanging around their necks.

Raul extended three fingers towards a satellite image of the earth.

“Third number is five hundred and seventy million. That is how many people will experience the game in some form tomorrow. If you are not going to be at Lambeau tomorrow, what point of view will you take? Click in and let’s see if we can talk about that today but first let’s throw it back to Matt.”

“Thanks, Raul,” Matt said as a stationary minicam programmed to recognize his voice refocused.

“The whole pack is here this Saturday, Larry, Felice, our friends here at Vince’s UltraSports Lounge.”

Cheers seeped in from the other side of the fishbowl. Felice engaged a roving ceiling camera to survey the sea of fans jammed into the lounge. Packers’ green blended with the sky and navy blues of New York apparel and the gold and black trappings of the Oilers.

For all the parties going on around Green Bay, the UltraSports Lounge was the *in* place to be this weekend. Wealthy investment bankers from Manhattan networked with energy tycoons from Latin America. They all milled about with actors, musicians, media people, local loyal Packers faithful, regular football fans, and general fun seekers.

“We also have a special guest some of our older subscribers may know along with younger people who know him from the Nostalgia Audio Talk Interface. Jim Rome hosted the popular AM radio sports talk program *The Jungle* from the mid-1990s until 2016. He also starred on the former ESPN and Fox Sports Global networks until a few years back with *Jim Rome is Burning* and *The Last Word*. His new macrocast, *Rome at Home* is an independent project where Jim talks about...well...whatever he wants. Thanks for coming on *Matt’s Pack*, Jim.”

“It’s great to be here, Matt.”

“Jim, a lot people who check in with our macrocast might not know about your early radio shows but I think they might appreciate what you were doing then.”

“Matt, anybody can check out the old *Jungle* on Natty and decide for themselves if it really was worth mentioning in a university communications class. It was raw stuff sometimes. I just cannot listen to those old clips. People still ask me about callers like Terence from Sierra Madre, Greg in Vegas, or Jeff in Richmond. Make no mistake. Those callers were part of the total entertainment package even if some days a little of them went a long way. Just like the people who click in to a macrocast now, talk radio callers kept things more real and more interactive than more conventional sports shows. *The Jungle* happened before you had the kinds of choices you see today. Back then, you just had terrestrial radio and a couple of hundred satellite channels. Nothing like what’s around now.”

Matt had listened to all of those old radio clips. He also knew Rome had a history of engaging and penetrating the defensive shells around athletes, coaches, team management and owners.

“You were pretty successful getting some big names in sports to talk openly and honestly about the game, the business, the fans and all the pressures of excelling on the field and in life. How did you pull that off? Most athletes answer questions with the same clichés.”

“Should be no mystery to you, Matt. Put an interfacer in front of a guy like Joey Freeland, and he’ll give you plenty of interesting material!” Jim kidded.

“But really,” he continued, “Just because someone makes a living, and a damn good one, throwing a ball or running a pro franchise, people are people. They just want a fair chance for fans to understand them without being misquoted. Like everyone else, sports figures make mistakes on the field and off. Some media people just like to build athletes up to be heroes so they can tear them down after a bad day or a bad season. If you can come at people sincerely like

a regular person, it makes a difference. Athletes, coaches, owners, no one likes being hounded or trapped into saying something they regret later. At the same time as an interviewer, you want honesty and candor, not some prepackaged response.”

Matt could have gone on for hours with Jim on the topic. Instead, he brought the conversation back to football specifically and tomorrow’s game.

“Jim, I know Vince Patterson showed you that old Super Bowl I ticket stub in the display case out front. What do you think is the biggest change in this game since then?”

“Are you asking because the Super Bowl is almost as old as me?”

“You said it not me.”

“Thanks for the slack, Matt. Look, what can you say? Everything has changed ... the money, the stadiums, how many people watch, the *way* they watch, globalization, all that. Call me a traditionalist but I still think the biggest change is having women on the field.”

Felice’s eyes brightened as Jim looked over to her.

“Jim, you’ve got to be talking about Ally Lamesa,” Felice said.

“Exactly. Kickers are one thing. I never gave them credit for even *being* football players, male or female.” Jim loved giving kickers a hard time. “But this is something I don’t think old Vince Lombardi would ever have imagined possible.”

Ally Lamesa played second-string cornerback for the Petrobras Brazil Oilers. Tomorrow she would likely be the first female player other than a kicker to participate in a Super Bowl. The sheer physical demands of an accelerating game and increasingly specialized offensive and defensive schemes prompted the GAFL to expand active team rosters to fifty-five players. This allowed anywhere from six to eight players to be used for strategic purposes ranging from super-sized goal line defenders to onsides-only kickers and other situational purpose players.

Lamesa was agile and strong, stood six feet two inches tall, and was active for about ten snaps a game mostly on third and long. Her Olympic record sprinter speed made her nearly impossible for wide receivers to shake off. Perhaps even more incredible was her twelve sacks for the Oilers during the 2038–39 season. The Oilers’ defensive front was capable of creating gaping holes that allowed Lamesa to scoot through and attack the quarterback.

Raul had all the relevant stats and more loading on his interfacier. He anticipated where Felice and Jim were going.

“So Jim,” Felice asked, “Is Ally going to get in the game tomorrow?”

Rome was from a generation of men that once mostly dismissed the possibility of female pro football players. Forty years earlier, Jim had been quick to welcome women callers to the then overwhelmingly male domain of sports talk radio.

“If she gets in it’s going to be because the game situation calls for it. Forget about her gender and historical significance. The only history Petrobras Brazil is interested in making Sunday is getting that Lombardi Trophy. If the Oilers force New York into third and fifteen, third and twenty, or if they have to protect a lead on defense in the last two minutes, she is going to be on the field. There are maybe only two players in the whole league who can outrun her pass coverage. I think what everyone wants to see is if she gets to the quarterback on one of those corner blitz packages the Oilers set up exclusively for her.”

Raul pulled up a statistic, which did not exist until 2031 and superimposed it on Ally Lamesa’s screen image. Felice noticed it without missing a beat and gave it context.

“If the Oilers do open a hole in that New York offensive front, we know Ally is capable of getting to quarterback Mikhail Rostovich,” Felice observed. “She has the fastest snap-to-sack

interval in the league. It takes just 1.227 seconds on average for her to find the gap and knock a quarterback down with that kind of speed burst.”

The snap-to-sack interval reflected how the game had come down to milliseconds. Sensors recorded nearly every ball movement, exchange, and player’s reflex for later analysis.

Raul, displaying his own reflexes, forged ahead with two generations of kids raised on increasingly sophisticated electronic games. His fingers zipped over the interfacer like a concert pianist.

“Ally can easily force quarterback fumbles on those quick corner blitzes. How many times has she done that, Raul? Come on now. Don’t make me guess! I know you have it right there in your hand.” Felice snapped her fingers across the table playfully goading Raul.

Raul had been frantically tapping his interfacer pulling up Ally Lamesa’s stats. It was a little *Matt’s Pack* game of sorts. They played it regularly during months of instantly settling football-related arguments with technological aid.

“Six times!” Raul said triumphantly pointing overhead. “She did it against Boston, London, Shanghai, Southern California, and twice at Johannesburg.” Five team logos flew over the panel display as the city names left his lips.

Jim’s jaw dropped. Not at the statistic itself but at how Raul had produced and illustrated Ally’s point on demand with no apparent advance preparation.

“Damn. You just pulled that info up off the cuff didn’t you, Raul?” Jim was impressed. “Where the hell were you when I was still doing TV?” he said.

Fact retrieval and display that once required the advanced, coordinated response of a producer, statistical researcher, computer graphics imagery or CGI specialist, and a master control studio, Raul accomplished at a moment’s notice. All he needed was the right pocket-sized device, a quick set of hands, and a sharp mind. He had all three. From all that button-pushing, a large percentage of his generation also had early onset arthritis compared to those at the turn of the century.

“Felice’s brain is always trying to outrun my hands, Jim.”

Since there was no tight clock or director ruling the macrocast, it simply unfolded as a vividly illustrated, spontaneous conversation among old and new friends. The oddly compelling hybrid of mass media and interpersonal communication was unlike any of the preformatted programming Global Sports Network served up. *Matt’s Pack’s* conversational spontaneity had not waned. However, the intimacy experienced by the original, small core of participants who clicked in during the early shows had diminished.

Larry pointed to his interfacer as he glanced over at Matt. Larry recognized a familiar digital signature from one of the hundreds of click-in requests. It belonged to a Green Bay local who often participated and sometimes sent program topic suggestions to Felice.

“I think we have someone we want to click in,” Matt said nodding to Larry.

Larry tapped the Join Macrocast command.

The overhead panel lit up to display a teenage girl in workout sweats pedaling a stationary exercise bicycle. Behind her was a picture window with a lovely view of Lake Michigan.

“Hi, Jamie!” Felice recognized the youth. She was a member of Felice’s running club and a sophomore at Jessie Ventura High School in Bellevue.

“Hey, Felice! Hi, guys!”

“Jamie, thanks for clicking in. What’s on your mind?” Matt asked.

“Well, I can’t wait for the game tomorrow even though Krafton Green Bay isn’t playing.” Jamie began.

The corporate sponsor designation rolled naturally from the tongue of the fifteen-year-old exactly as Krafton and dozens of other major corporations envisioned. To Jamie, and millions of others in her age group, the team had always been the Krafton Green Bay Packers. Older, disgruntled fans like Matt’s father, Chris, rhetorically asked if nothing was sacred or beyond the grasp of sponsor identity.

Sometimes the more cynical fans needed a history lesson.

Almost exactly one hundred years before the groundbreaking New York Jet Blue deal, the Green Bay team took the name of the Indian Packing Company. Following the acquisition of Indian Packing by the Acme Packing Company for twelve million dollars, the team played as the Acme Packers. The company bought team uniforms for Curly Lambeau in 1921. Acme gave Lambeau the use of a company-owned playing facility. The business relationship in place at the dawn of the modern NFL had come full circle. It was just a much bigger circle now.

“I’m really rooting for Petrobras Brazil because of Ally Lamesa,” Jamie continued as she invoked the name of the Brazilian energy conglomerate.

“I saw you talking about her, Felice, and I just want to know, are you going to watch the game from Ally’s POV?”

In 2039, *point of view*, or POV, technology offered choices that fundamentally altered the spectator’s experience.

Nearly seventy years had passed since Super Bowl IV when Kansas City Chiefs coach Hank Stram famously patrolled the sidelines wired for sound. NFL films documented Stram’s every word and move throughout that game, introducing a new dimension to pro football coverage.

By 2032, tiny live cameras mounted just over the upper facemask of every player on the field redefined watching the game.

POV allowed fans to interactively choose and toggle between a quarterback’s perspective as the pocket collapsed and a running back as he burst through a hole. One of the most replayed highlights of the regular season last November was Ally Lamesa’s point of view as she leapt to slap a slightly under-thrown ball out of the hands of Joey Freeland. Even the officials’ caps were outfitted with cameras to aid the replay review of penalty calls.

“Girl, you *know* I’ll be clicked on Ally’s helmet when she’s in there, but I’ll switch things up too,” Felice replied to Jamie. “I want to be in the New York huddle when they’re on offense. Staying with the big picture keeps me in tune with the whole flow of the game.”

At any moment, viewers could control and instantaneously switch their point of view or select a default mode that gave an overall perspective of action on the field. For game broadcasts, the GAFL sold each point of view to sponsors. Each player received a prorated portion of additional subscription fees that fans paid to access the POV option. Every player and agent knew how many minutes fans collectively engaged any individual point of view. Individual POV ratings determined sponsor pricing and endorsement payouts.

On Sunday, Ally Lamesa’s POV click-ins would earn her three one-hundredths of a penny for every viewer minute logged. She would earn one hundred fifty thousand in personal point of view revenues based on fan subscribers spending an average of ten minutes watching the game from her the perspective of her helmet camera. Her POV sponsor, Reebok, would pay \$1.5 million to GSN for the product information link embedded in the broadcast image sent from Ally’s helmet throughout Super Bowl LXXII.

After Felice finished up with Jamie, Matt clicked in a scheduled guest from India, Ramesh Prasad, a software developer. Prasad had enhanced the point of view visor headsets that fans in the stadium could wear to watch the game from the stands from as many perspectives as GSN viewers.

“If you take the quarterback’s point of view and he gets sacked, yeah, you’ll probably feel a little dizzy under the visor,” Ramesh noted.

Later more participants clicked in.

Raul argued with a Jet fan that saw a New York victory as inevitable.

“People said that about Dallas in 2029 and if you want to go back even farther, the Patriots in 2008. Look what happened there. Getting to the championship undefeated is no guarantee you’ll stay that way,” Raul asserted.

Larry played back an interview he conducted earlier in the week with a group of fans from Sao Paulo that made the pilgrimage to Green Bay from Brazil. As the macrocast returned to live mode, he reminded the audience of the South American nation’s true pastime.

“The Brazilians I met said they were having almost as much fun at the Super Bowl this week as they did at Carnival in Rio. But they were also certain to remind me of their true number one sport when they gave me this little gift.” Larry then reached under the table and produced an official World Cup soccer ball autographed by several members of the Brazilian national team.

A handful of Jim Rome’s old radio callers clicked in and unanimously voiced their appreciation for both the guest and macrocast technology in general.

“Hey, Jimmy!” one of them who went by the nickname “Doc Mike,” called out on the screen.

“Doc Mike! How are you, buddy?” Jim warmly responded in welcoming a character from his former universe of sports talk-radio junkies. Dr. Mike Di’Tolla, a retired dentist and *Jungle* legend, had been heard by millions on Jim’s radio show largely in the late 1990s, along with a wide cast of call-in characters that all took pleasure in ranting about sports topics of the day, or in *Jungle* speak, “running smack.”

“I’m enjoying listening to football fans like these young guys here that know their stuff,” Doc said as he squinted and pointed a walking stick at the screen for emphasis. “As far as I’m concerned, you can keep all these GSN talking heads working off cue cards to set up the next commercial, ah yeah, *feature story*, about Joe Namath the astronaut.”

The dig was an obvious reference to the Jet Blue piece aired earlier on the worldwide broadcast of Matt’s soon to be new employer. Matt cringed slightly as Doc went on.

“I’ll take *Matt’s Pack* any day over that crap. You know this macrocaster thing changes everything. In a way, I’m somewhat glad it wasn’t around in *Jungle* days, Jim. That could have been scary if all those callers could have started their own shows that easily.”

“Let me cut in here, Doc,” Jim said. He saw Doc’s setup and ran with it just as he had in the old days.

“You mean to say macrocasting could develop kind of like when e-mail or Web cams first came along and every idiot with a computer dished out worthless spam or posted videos of their stupid pet tricks? Come on, Doc. You know that will *never* happen especially once everyone can afford to own macrocasters. You know as well as I do. *All* the programming will be great!”

Rome’s trademark sarcasm oozed. It had made his original show a refreshingly intelligent departure from much of the mindless banter and chatter of his day. Technological innovation itself could never prevent lousy content. It could only expand and amplify it.

“Hope you’re taking notes, Matt.” Doc Mike said as he reached for his interfacer to click out. “All the good, bad, and ugly competition is coming. Don’t go letting some GSN suit take the edge off your smack or I’m out.”

Doc tapped his interfacer. His image dropped off the screen replaced by Matt chuckling and shaking his head.

“You know Doc still has it,” Jim said of his former show’s contributor. “What do you think, Matt? You ready for prime time?”

The question was part encouragement and part challenge.

“Who knows, Jim?” Matt answered. “We’re only here for the beer.”

“I hear that! Let’s wrap this thing,” Raul shot from the other side of the table.

Great Lakes Lagers’ informal agreement with *Matt’s Pack* called for a minimum half hour weekly macrocast through the end of the season. Today an hour and ten minutes had flown by. Eleven point forty-three million people clicked on this final edition show. Thousands of them wanted to click in.

It was time for the founder to address those masses about both his own future and that of the macrocast.

“One last thing before you sign off,” Larry interjected. “Matt, how are you going to experience the game tomorrow?”

“I’ll get there in a minute, Larry,” Matt replied and squarely addressed the camera and audience.

“If you saw me on GSN today you already know the network hired me as a content contributor. I had two, nonnegotiable conditions for taking the job. The first was letting me be myself and not someone the network thinks I should be. I hope that works out.”

“That’s one,” Felice said.

Matt’s mom nudged her husband, Chris, and pointed to the cube over the fishbowl. Geri and Felice already knew about the second condition. Chris had no idea he was a central figure in part of Matt’s negotiation with GSN

“You asked me how I was going to experience the game, Larry,” Matt said. “I guess people expect a tech geek and gamer like me would want to experience it from every angle that fans can access now. You might think I would want to be fitted with a spectator visor or sit in a Lambeau Dome luxury immersion suite. None of that is really important,” he asserted.

Face value for Super Bowl LXXII tickets exceeded twenty-two thousand North American dollars each. Scalper’s prices topped ten times that sum.

A luxury immersion suite for twenty reportedly sold at a charity auction for seventy-three million dollars. The princely sums made the game itself difficult to access in person for most average fans, including the Rodgers family.

“My second condition to give up macrocasting and sign on with GSN was two seats together in the stadium tomorrow, any two in the house. I’ll probably just bring a pair of old binoculars. My dad, Chris Rodgers, likes to experience the game the old-fashioned way through his own eyes. Tomorrow the two of us are going to be inside Lambeau Dome watching the game together.”

Chris gasped and turned to his smiling wife just beyond the glass barrier directly across from Matt.

“You knew all along?” Chris asked his wife. Geri nodded vigorously as a tear welled in her eye. Matt looked across at his dad and continued.

“We didn’t have a lot of money growing up but my dad always managed to find enough to take me to a game at Old Lambeau. Being there with him for the biggest game ever played in Green Bay, at least the biggest one that doesn’t involve the Packers, well, there’s really no better point of view for me.”

No network could replicate the spontaneous personal touch of a macrocast any more than reality television could replicate life. No macrocast could replicate the personal connection Matt and Chris would renew on Sunday.

Matt wrapped up with a reminder to the audience.

“Everyone in the Packers Nation can still click on this subchannel for Larry, Raul, and Felice on Green Bay game days next season. I hope nobody minds when I borrow you three now and then over at GSN. Thanks Vince. Thanks Great Lakes Lagers. Thank you all for clicking on and clicking in.”

Matt then reached across the table, grasped Raul’s interfacer, and clicked off the macrocaster.

Millions had seen and heard substantive, unfettered, and unfiltered content. In months and years to come, others would master using the compact and expandable megaphone a macrocast provided to advance ideas both noble and nefarious. For now, *Matt’s Pack* used the device to transform a game day tradition of celebrating and commiserating among friends into the world’s biggest electronic tailgate party.

A postscript ... a couple of months after I wrote this story, I decided on a whim to Google “Lambeau Dome”. I figured a typical query for such an odd term would have few, if any, results. One was notable. I followed this link and my jaw dropped.

<http://www2.jsonline.com/packer/sbxxxii/comm/bud91097.stm>

I had found a September 10, 1997 column from longtime Packer reporter Bud Lea. Bud covered 31 Super Bowls before retiring from the Milwaukee Sentinel in 1995. He was the Sentinel's first beat reporter to cover the Packers, starting in 1954. He became sports editor of the Sentinel in 1972, and continued as sports columnist.

The column titled, “The NFL in 20 Years”, was a brief speculative vision of a future Lambeau Dome. Bud’s “Lambeau Dome” was placed in the year 2017 in an NFL with nightly games and advanced technological innovations. We had independently conjured remarkably similar fantasy projections 11 years apart in real life (1997/2008) and with future settings 22 years apart (2017/2039). Who knows if those numbers mean anything at all but there they are.

I looked Bud Lea up and contacted him. He told me that he is a semi-retired “old scribbler” still writing a column for Packer Plus, which is published 40 times a year by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. He had forgotten all about the column he wrote in 1997. Then again, a guy who has been around as much as Bud has probably forgotten more than most of us can claim to know. I sent a Bud a signed prepublication galley edition of *Making The Big Game* with my compliments. I respect Bud for his innovative thought process at a life stage when many chose only to look back rather than forward.

- Jeffrey Fekete www.MakingTheBigGame.com