

The coming of the Yuletide season imposes a solemn obligation upon those of us whose love of televised sport is equaled by a passionate commitment to progressive, humanist, liberal politics. Once again, we must decide which teams to root for during the annual marathon of post-season football.

And once again, our decision must be made, not on emotional grounds, but on which teams more genuinely reflect the Jeffersonian-Lincolnesque-Rooseveltian-Stevensonian-McGovernian traditions to which we all repair.

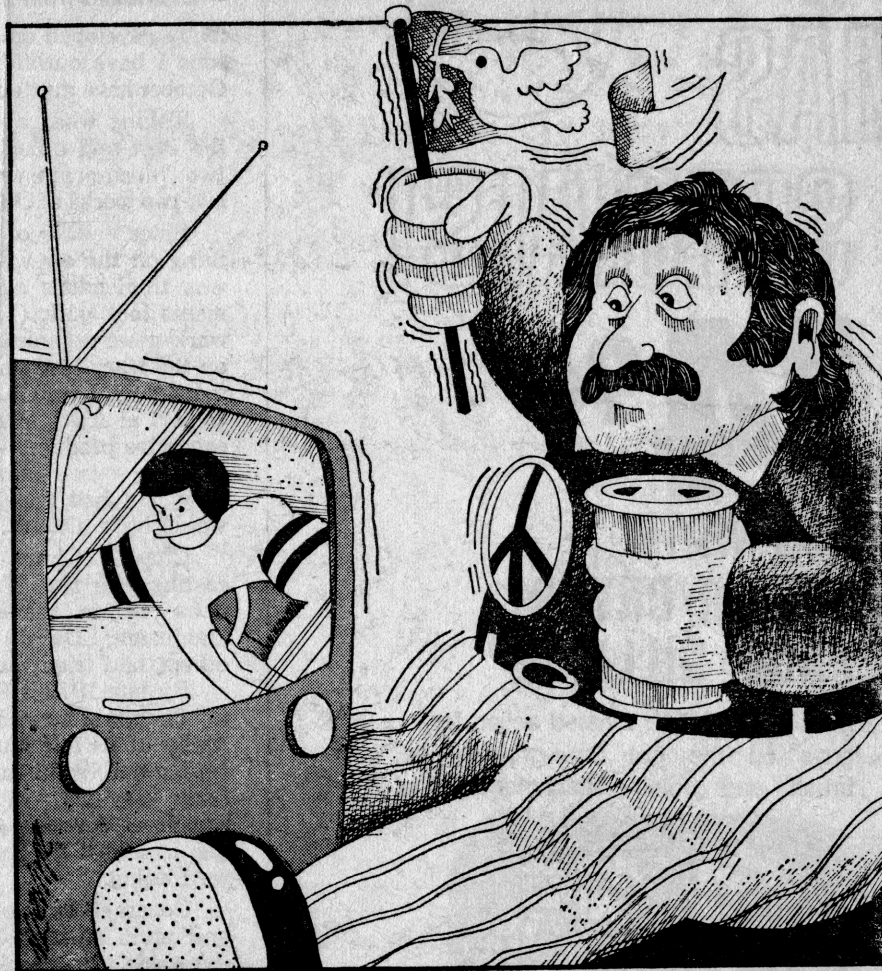
This decision is burdened by the annual collapse of the Giants and Jets as playoff contenders. While geographic chauvinism is frowned upon by true progressives, a certain pride of place is perfectly acceptable; a pride strengthened by New York's generally progressive teams.

The Mets, for example, embody the spirit of the underdog, a Frank Capraish triumph over powerful forces of concentrated might. The Knicks, in their unselfish team play, suggest a kind of Swedish-style democratic socialism, plus a commitment to racial balance (the guards are black, the forwards white, and the centers alternate).

Since neither the Jets nor the Giants will be playing for the championship, we New Yorkers who will be strapped to our TV sets from Advent through Epiphany must decide who receives our moral support.

Some choices are easy. Suppose, for example, Dallas plays Minnesota. Dallas, the citadel of reactionary violence, is almost barred from support, while Minnesota, home of Eugene McCarthy, is usually a prohibitive favorite. (Hubert Humphrey's support for the war in Vietnam is a negative factor, of course, but not as against Dallas.)

Los Angeles against Washington is also a simple matter. Now that L.A. has replaced Mayor Yorty with Tom Bradley, we right-thinking people root enthusiastically for the Rams, while the Redskins bear the twin bur-



Newsday drawing by Ned Levine

den of Richard Nixon's partisanship and Coach George Allen's martinet "winning-is-everything" philosophy. Nit-pickers, of course, may argue that the District of Columbia was one of only two places to vote against Nixon in 1972, and is trying to rehabilitate a moody, withdrawn black named Duane Thomas, while L.A. is dangerously close to Orange County, home of retired admirals and Impeach Earl Warren bumper-stickers. But the Rams clearly have the edge.

Other choices, however, present real difficulty: for example, Pittsburgh against Oakland. Steelworker President I. W. Abel was an influential voice against George McGovern

in 1972, while Oakland's voters refused to elect Bobby Seale mayor even though he put on a coat and tie and promised not to kill anybody. On the other hand, Oakland was the setting of some of the most effective anti-war demonstrations in the late 1960s, and it is also very close to Berkeley, where the kids first tried to tell us something. Pittsburgh, though, has a liberal Democrat as mayor.

While this contest would be difficult to decide, we liberals must recognize that a substantial segment of blue-collar America no longer believes We care about Them. The least we can do is show our Moral Concern. Anyway, what other team better

expresses the hopes for a black-ethnic coalition than the Steelers, with their half Italian-half-black running back, Franco Harris?

This same painful, but crucial calculation affects our choices in the college bowl games. Notre Dame-Alabama in the Sugar Bowl is a snap: Father Hesburgh's commitment to civil rights and his criticism of Nixon more than make-up for the suspicions we may hold about Notre Dame's position on church-state separation. Besides, Alabama is still working off its Sheriff Clark-Bull Connor past, and it is a long way from evening the score.

But what do you do with Ohio State against Southern California in the Rose Bowl? Woody Hayes is a total Nixonian, while Southern Cal is the home of Haldeman, Erlichman, and scores of other Teutons. This may be the closest contest yet: Ohio's liberal Democrat John Gilligan is a far more acceptable governor than Ronald Reagan. In fairness, however, California's senators, Tunney and Cranston, are certainly preferable to Ohio's Saxbe and Taft; perhaps it would be best to root for a tie.

We here at the Institute for Correct Political Analysis are aware that certain of our critics may question the worth of this rating system. We reply that, for too long, liberals have been guilty of elitism, snubbing the passions of our ordinary, unenlightened countryman, rummaging through I. F. Stone's Weekly and the New York Review of Books while 40,000,000 Americans are cheering on their favorites.

Unless we are willing to fuse our own superior political thinking with the interests of our lesser citizens, we shall never achieve the political power with which to save them. Surely that goal is worth a few dozen hours of properly trained TV watching. □

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