

*The desire for fun
and the search for profit
make America's way of play
a billion-dollar business.*

The Pursuit Of Happiness

BY JEFF GREENFIELD

Americans," Mark Twain wrote in *Letters From The Earth*, "work harder at having a good time than at any other single endeavor."

If Twain ever came back to Earth for a visit on a sunny Sunday in Orlando, Florida, he might be forgiven for congratulating himself on his insight. The restaurants of Walt Disney World's Contemporary Resort Hotel are filled with families urging each other on toward a swift conclusion of the meal, the faster to jump aboard the Monorail, the faster to enter the Magic Kingdom, the faster to beat the crowds to major attractions such as Space Mountain and 20,000 Leagues Under The Sea.

Grown-ups—the fathers, generally—guide their platoons down Main Street, maps and guidebooks in hand, cameras at the ready for an appearance—live and in person—by Goofy, Pluto, Captain Hook and,* first among equals, Mickey Mouse himself. The battle to

place one's child in the friendly arms of a walking, breathing Disney creation would do credit to a Stanley Cup hockey final.

By the end of the day—as the crowds stream out of the Magic Kingdom for a Monorail ride back to a hotel or automobile, as the exhausted grown-ups sling their sons and daughters over their shoulders—a stranger might well wonder whether "leisure" is the right word to describe so frenetic an activity.

Yet, in a larger sense, "leisure" doesn't begin to describe the inventiveness, the energy and the remarkable economic power that an America increasingly obsessed with its after-hours life has injected into the business of play. In our time, "the pursuit of happiness" is not simply a line from the Declaration of Independence. It is an element of our society that is transforming where and how we live.

You can, if you choose, prove this fact with numbers: We spend some \$200 billion a year rooting for the Mets,

cheering on Rambo, weeping at *Carmen*, hiking through the Appalachians, motoring through the Rockies, finding the right tennis shoe, and otherwise diverting ourselves from the pressures of work, school and family. But America is a rich country; a \$4 trillion-a-year gross national product leaves lots of room for diversions.

You can measure our love of play by other numbers: 50 million of us pay to watch professional baseball; 30 million cheer on the football teams of pro and college ranks; 60 million root home the horses every year; and a similar number thrill to the smell of burning rubber and exhaust at the auto races.

Other cultures, however, pack arenas for cricket, rugby and soccer, and for all the pop psychology about the uniquely American obsession with sports, no state-side passion can match the specter of a European soccer game turning into a fatal riot.

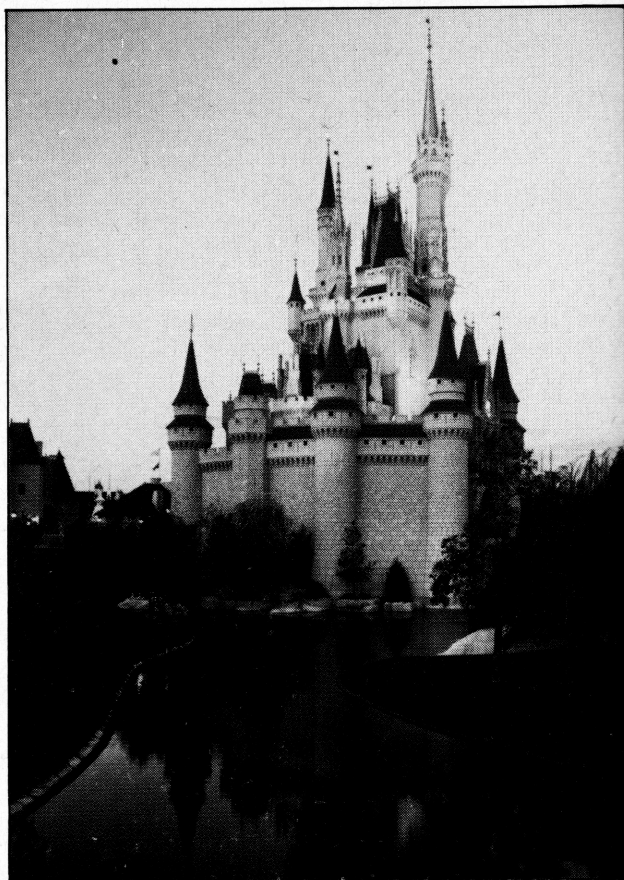
No, there is something else that marks the American way of play, and that is the astonishing interaction of the search for fun, the search for profits and the American capacity to invent new goods—and new ways of life—in pursuit of escape.

A TRIP TO THE LAKE OR MOUNTAINS, for example, hardly evokes visions of high technology. But high tech has had a marked impact on the outdoors. With 20 million Americans setting out each year to hike, fish, scuba dive and explore, it's not surprising that businesses of all sorts have taken aim squarely at the market.

For instance, one in every 10 U.S. auto sales represents a recreational vehicle. Automakers are not exactly inattentive to this fact. That's why Honda has come out with a 4x4 Fourtrax, an off-road All-Terrain Vehicle powered by a 350-cc engine and equipped with a 5-speed transmission, including reverse.

Or take the appeal of water. New materials have made possible sturdy, water-resistant, incredibly lightweight boats that can easily be tied to the roof of a car for a quick drive to the nearest lake. The Hobie 17, a 1-handed unarig catamaran made of Mylar, sells for under \$4000: That's probably less than the cost of lumber. If you can pay more—say, about \$10,000—you can buy into a new class of bass boats capable of 80 mph, or buy a center-console power boat.

Even the simple fishing rod, once the symbol of a pre-technological Norman Rockwell America, has been revolutionized by the urge to turn someone's leisure into profit. Rods made of graphite and Kevlar have brought down prices, while giving a fisherman a far better "signal" from lure to rod blank. Rod grips have electric hand warmers, and reels feature programmable elec-



Cinderella's Castle towers over Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, where millions of people visit every year.



Houston's summer heat and rain are never a factor at the Astrodome, the first of a growing number of domed stadiums.

tronics. Daiwa produces a microcomputerized bait-casting reel, for example, that gives the sportsman an instantaneous reading of his retrieval speed on an LCD display, thus permitting him to duplicate his cast once he hits pay dirt.

These are small-scale examples of entrepreneurial dedication in the service of recreation. On a grander scale are the revolutions wrought by those determined to bring big-time spectator sports to their regions.

In 1953, the Boston Braves broke a half-century tradition by moving their major-league baseball fran-



PHOTO BY TOM LIPPETT

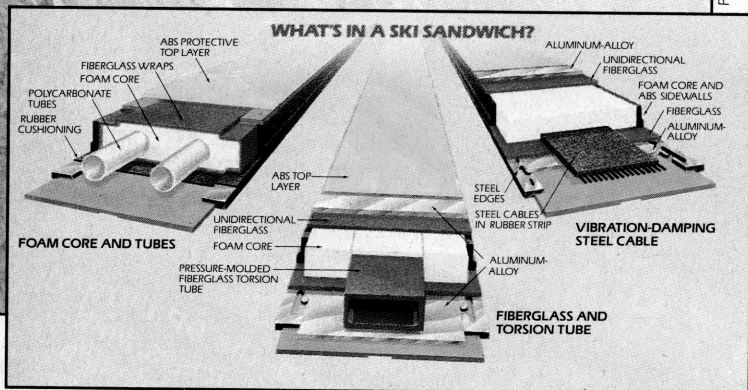
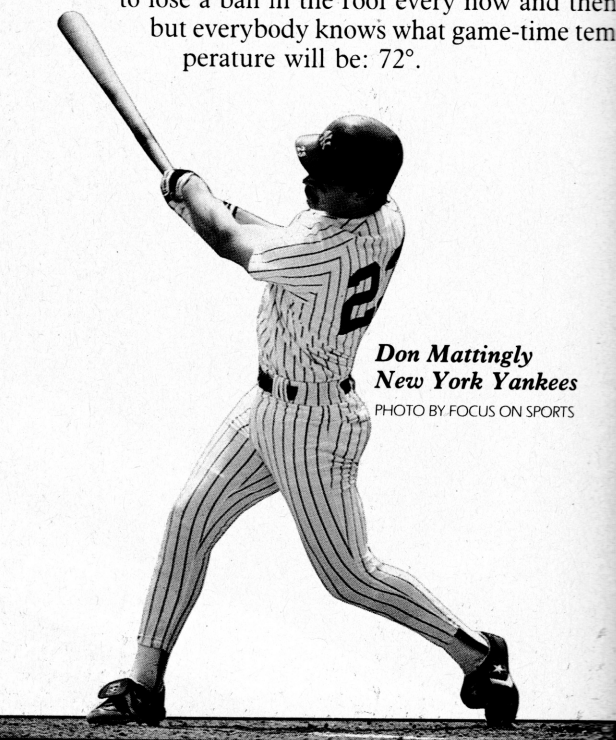


ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGE RETSECK

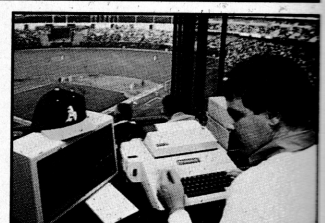
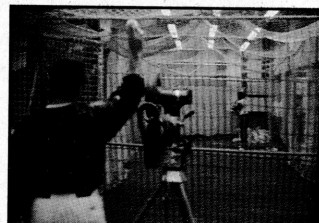
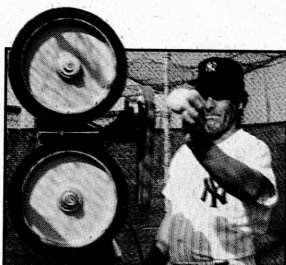
Skiing's increasing popularity has been fueled by rapid advances in the safety and durability of the equipment.

Mechanical arms fill in for human ones when the demands of hitters temporarily exceed the supply of pitchers. Baseball has also entered the computer age, with a number of teams now using their own computer systems.



Don Mattingly
New York Yankees

PHOTO BY FOCUS ON SPORTS



That gave ideas to other cities climatologically unsuited for baseball. Now the Seattle Mariners and the Minnesota Twins play the summer game indoors. Meanwhile, from New Orleans to Pontiac, Michigan, pro football has found itself protected indoors from the ravages of winter, and New York City may well find itself with a domed stadium before the decade is out. Why? Because sports fans have to eat, drink, park and find a place to lodge themselves when they come into town for a big game. Conservative estimates indicate a major-league franchise can add tens of millions of dollars to a local economy every season.

IF YOU NEED THE ULTIMATE PROOF OF how leisure can literally change the map, go back to where we began: to the harried parents and supercharged children at Disney World. What Mickey and Friends have wrought in central Florida is nothing short of incredible.

Fifteen years ago, Orlando was a town that few outsiders paid much attention to. It was a largely agricultural community of orange groves, pine forests, cattle farms and swamps. Barely one in 20 visitors to Florida ever made his way from Miami, the Keys and the Everglades to visit the region.

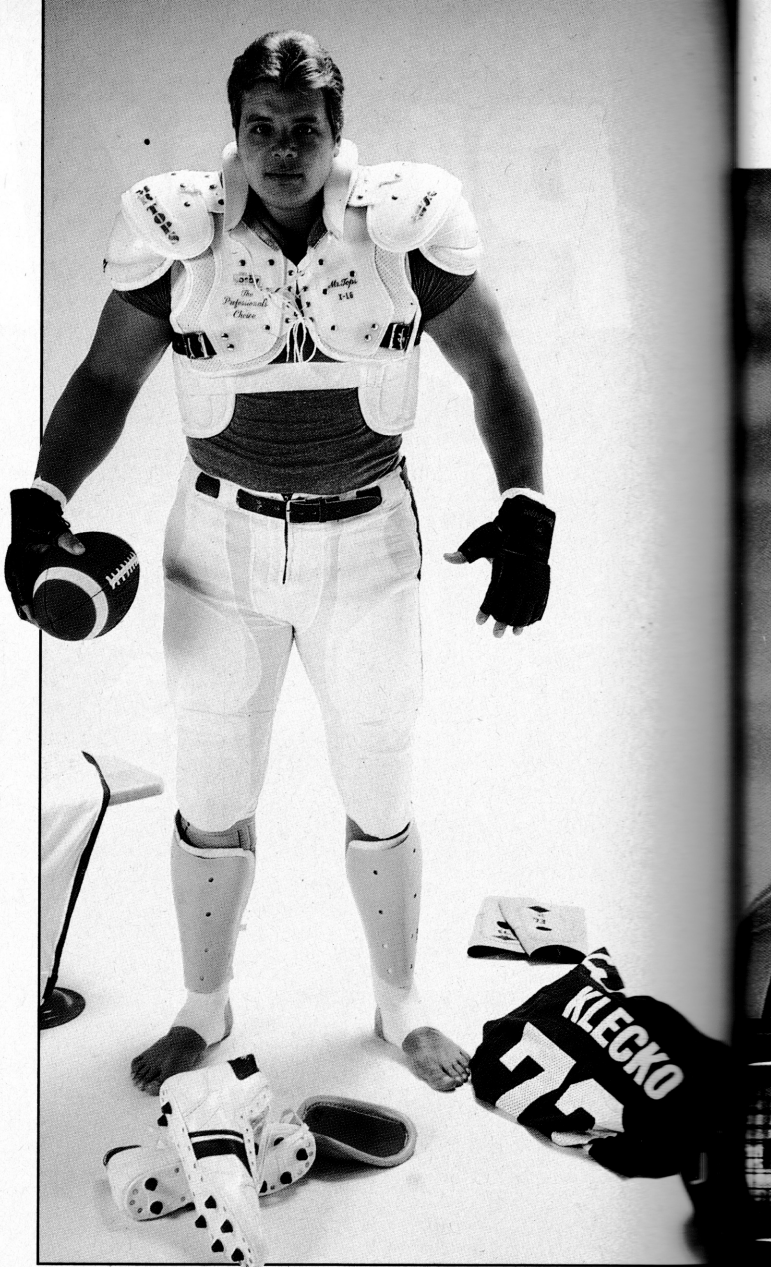
Then Walt Disney bought 27,500 acres of land 20 miles southwest of Orlando for a total of \$5.5 million. Fifteen years ago, the Magic Kingdom opened.

It was Disney's dream to surround the Magic Kingdom with a kind of technological utopia: a carefully planned community that would avoid the ravages of urban sprawl, pollution and unguided growth. Instead, in a typically American fashion, the forces of free enterprise produced an unplanned, unguided explosion whose magnitude we are only now beginning to gauge.

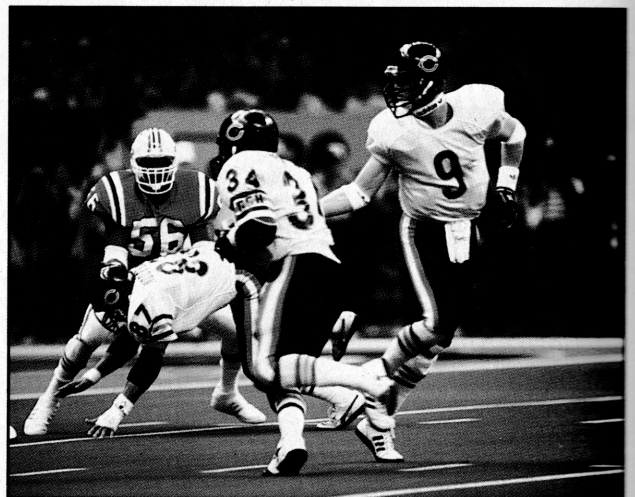
Today, 15 million tourists visit Disney World each year, and 10 million more visit Epcot, the scientifically oriented theme park a few miles away. That crush of tourists had to stay somewhere, so a hotel-building boom began. The Orlando community has more than 55,000 hotel rooms available or under construction, making it the sixth-biggest hotel city in America.

That, however, is only the first link in the chain. Disney World brought a world-class airport to Orlando, one that last year served more than 10 million visitors. That, in turn, made the community the center of a major transportation hub, which in turn made it more attractive to business. Further, all those tourists included people who found the relatively cheap land and pleasant climate of central Florida an attractive place to relocate, for work or for retirement.

Such major employers as AT&T, General Electric and Westinghouse put new high-tech businesses in the



It's still football, but the New York Jets' Joe Klecko gets ready for the game by donning modern, lightweight gear that's far removed from his predecessors' leather helmets.



Super Bowl Sunday is the holiest of holy days for the pro football fan. This year's game between Chicago and New England drew a sellout crowd and record television ratings.

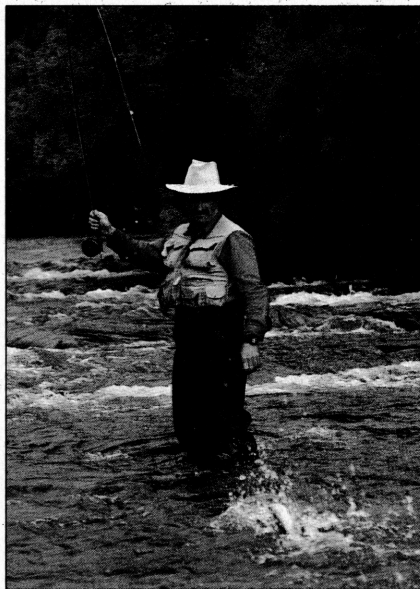
Orlando area, including AT&T's \$400 million integrated-circuit plant. Long-time New York book publisher Harcourt Brace Jovanovich relocated to the Orlando area—and found itself saving \$15 million in costs in its first year there.

All this growth, in turn, made downtown Orlando a natural environment for a boom. It attracted the attention of William du Pont III, great-grandson of the chemical magnate, who has put together a \$450 million development on a 14-acre site. It will feature a hotel complex, an office tower and retail shops. Sun Bank has a \$150 million development. All told, there is more than \$1 billion in construction under way in the city, and across central Florida the total of new construction is an incredible \$17 billion. Once-sleepy Orlando is now the fastest-growing community in the state of Florida.

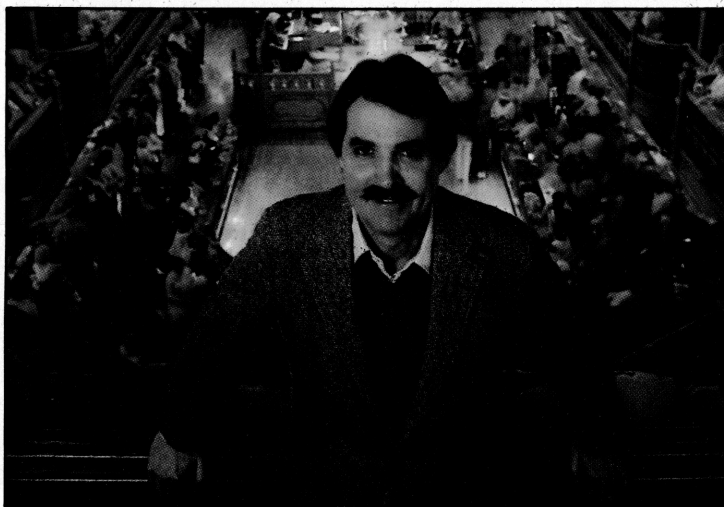
To get some sense of how a Mickey Mouse operation—literally—could influence so much, I recently drove from Disney World along Interstate 75 to Orlando. Every inch of scenery along the way was crowded with signs of development, and with billboards advertising other attractions that had found Disney World an incredible magnet for business.

Here was a new Marriott Hotel, with 1500 rooms; there, a Hyatt, a Wyndham, a Knights Inn, a Quality Inn, a Ramada, a Super 8, a Days Inn. Here were the calls to Sea World, Circus World, Gatorland Zoo, Wet 'n Wild, Cypress Gardens, Emerald World and Gold Museum, Malibu Grand Prix/Malibu Castle, Flea World, Seminole Greyhound Park, Kennedy Space Center's Spaceport USA, Busch Gardens, Xanadu.

Coming into downtown Orlando, I saw a skyline that did not exist a decade ago: modern glass and steel towers with the insignias of the new economic giants of the region. Names like Sun Bank, Atlantic Bank, Coral Gables Federal, CNA. Along Pine Street is the spanking-new



Even with modern equipment, in the end it's still a contest of man vs. fish.



Bob Snow brought the Cheyenne Saloon, heart of Church Street Station, to downtown Orlando.

Orange County Administration Building, erected with tourist dollars that have come to Orlando in the time since Disney World.

Yet perhaps the most striking development of all was the remarkable center of nightlife in downtown Orlando—Church Street Station. The man who made the dream come true is Bob Snow.

Imagine a city block with nothing but restaurants, saloons, a shopping arcade and a restored railroad station. An iron-work bridge spans the street. There are no cars, just an antique fire engine and a horse-drawn carriage—and every now and then, a real train, courtesy of the Seaboard system, rumbles down the railroad track that borders the complex. At night, the Cheyenne Saloon, Rosie O'Grady's restaurant and the Bumby Arcade are ablaze with decorative lights.

Dixieland bands play. Music, food and drink are everywhere. Stained-glass windows decorate the old buildings, at least one of them a century old, now lovingly brought back to life. And at the center of the action is 43-year-old Snow, whose handlebar mustache symbolizes the times-gone-by atmosphere of Church Street Station.

When Snow came to Orlando at the start of the 1970s, it must have taken a man with an extremely high sense of adventure to see any possibility in the motley collection of wig shops, used-clothing stores, winos, beer bottles and Manpower temporary-work centers that was Church Street Station. But Snow, who had fished and played his saxophone across Alaska, flown Navy jets around Pensacola, and turned \$400 and a used Porsche into a highly successful Pensacola night spot, had the vision.

"I knew it was going to be an exciting, growing market," he says now, shouting over the noise of his packed Rosie O'Grady's restaurant. "It had beaches, it had the right climate—and there was Disney World, which is a whole world of its own."

Today, Church Street Station is a \$20 million-a-year operation, employing between 700 and 1000 people. Now Snow can envision not just a downtown fun spot, but the beginnings of a major metropolis.

"It's gonna be the greatest city in Florida, eventually," he says. "And the best thing is, we can still mold it; not like Miami, which just grew. We can have all the good things of a big city without any of the problems associated with a big city."

Snow pauses to puff on a good cigar, and then smiles.

"Tourism—it's such a clean dollar. A tourist dollar is the cleanest dollar there is. You don't have to build sewers, schools, roads. All you gotta do is smile and give 'em a good time. That's why I don't ever see Orlando as a huge city,

because its base is tourism. There's no heavy industry. It's never going to be a blue-collar town. It's really more like San Francisco—a lot of culture, a lot of amenities."

Snow is on his way to making that vision a reality. He is working with James Rouse, the master developer of Boston's Faneuil Hall and Baltimore's Inner Harbor, to build a 100,000-square-foot Festive Market next to Church Street Station. It would feature a massive new hotel, high-toned retail shops, including the baked goods of famed French chef Paul Bocuse, and the biggest wine cellar in the state of Florida.

Had you told an Orlando resident 15 years ago that such a complex would be coming to the city, "he'd have laughed in your face," Snow says. And, while it is clear he believes Church Street Station would have made it with or without Disney World, Snow credits the giant



An arcade game comes to life: In Photon, played in a futuristic maze of neon lights, the object is to avoid "extinction" by shooting your opponents with a light beam from a laser gun.

tourism complex for providing the magnet for the region.

"Forty percent of our business is tourist," he says. "And they're here for Disney. They don't fly into Orlando to see

us—they're here for Mr. Mouse. Our size, Sea World and all of the others—it just never would have happened without Disney World."

How, then, to measure the distance from a tourist's search for family entertainment to a multibillion-dollar addition to the Florida economy? Joe Mettiga, special aide to Orlando Mayor Bill Frederick, talks about the three waves: first, tourism; second, new people relocating to central Florida, with "corporations following the people."

"Now," Mettiga says, "in the third wave, Orlando is emerging as a major convention center. We've also seen a major boost in residential developments, major businesses and commercial developments, and there are signs it will continue into the 1990s.

"We estimate that, 788 people a day are moving into the metropolitan Orlando area, and a city the size of Tampa is being

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added to the population every year."

What might be the ultimate consequences of the leisure-into-business equation? With Disney soon to begin work on a \$300 million movie studio near Disney World, with high-tech industries continuing to move into the region, it is at least possible that Florida may become the California of the year 2000—with all of the social and political implications of a new megastate for America. Far-reaching as it may seem, 21st-century historians may someday write that what began with a theme park in the swamps of central Florida wound up helping to change the economic and political face of a region—and maybe even a country.

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN recreation is measured in megabucks. A Dallas-based company, for example, is working on becoming the McDonald's of high-tech recreation in the next decade. Photon is an electronic game in which the players are human beings. The 10,000-square-foot game is played in a maze lined with neon lights and futuristic scenery. The players get a real laser that fires harmless light at sensors on robotic enemies. Hit the enemy's sensor and you score a kill, while also saving yourself from "extinction." Two years ago, there was just one Photon game in Dallas. But the developers have sold franchises to a half-dozen entrepreneurs for about a quarter-million dollars each, and you can already play Photon in New Jersey, just across the bridge from New York, and in the Los Angeles area.

Lasers and sensors may also find their way into professional sports. For instance, the professional boxer of the 1990s may be armored in Kevlar lined with light sensors. The equipment already is available. Inventor Byron Donzias has created the Kevlar flak jacket for pro football quarterbacks. And he is working with a boxing promoter to make lightweight gear that a boxer might wear to protect his face, head, kidneys and stomach. Add to the protective gear sensors that Xerox has developed for Army war games, and you have a whole new sport of boxing. The fighters would don their uniforms and enter the ring. The object would be to strike a blow against the sensors. Tiny lasers in the boxer's glove would register a score each time they contacted a sensor. A ringside computer would tally the points and the fight would end with the traditional knockout, TKO or points. Instead of human judges, the laser system would score the points. Boxers who strike dangerous blows would have their licenses lifted, an additional selling point.

Boxing enthusiasts know about Don-

zias's new designs and are divided on whether such technologies will ever be accepted in the ring. But many promoters believe that safety and scoring technologies will be the only things that can rescue boxing from a mounting public outcry against its casualty rate.

Other devices being developed for future sports include robotized refs for tennis and an electronic baseball that can change its center of gravity with a command from the dugout. All the technol-

ogies are far-flung but available right now. And there is big money behind them, held by backers who believe that wired sports—wired everything—is the wave of the future.

No wonder, then, that we work so hard at play. For we bring our national characteristic to our leisure as well as our factories, plants, farms and offices. And the ultimate irony is that we wind up reshaping America as much by our diversions as by our vocations. **PM**

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