

Avoid these 10 missteps when hosting a Super Bowl party

by Brad Burke

Buffalo Bills running back Thurman Thomas was the National Football League's most valuable player during the 1991 season, feared for his breakaway speed, soft hands and ankle-breaking cuts. Heading into Super Bowl XXVI, Thomas had all the tools necessary to dominate.

All the tools except a helmet. The all-pro, all-world, all-everything back spent the Bills' first two offensive plays of that game scouring the sideline for his misplaced head gear. Neither he nor his team recovered in Buffalo's 37-24 loss.

The moral of the story: Don't ever bet on the Bills. And, more to the point, even in our biggest moment we can still overlook the most glaringly obvious tasks.

So it goes in the Super Bowl, and at Super Bowl parties. If you're hosting one, it won't necessarily take an extra large blunder to bungle your XLI fiesta. Minor oversights could make you the goat of the neighborhood.

Keep your eyes open and your fridge stocked. And take it from Thurman, don't lose your head.

Before you kick things off, review these 10 simple yet avoidable problems that could derail your party:

- You have more guests than comfortable chairs.

What's worse than writhing painfully on a rock-hard coffee table? Standing all game long, hoping the guy on the table chokes on a Funion and abandons his seat. Hosts should provide as many decent places to rest as bodies. Lawn and folding chairs will work, but avoid wiry kitchen chairs that imprint cheesy floral patterns onto guests' backs like ill-conceived tattoos. And no beanbag chairs. This isn't euchre night at the freshman dorm, people.

- You serve messy foods on flimsy plates.

PARTY MISHAPS - I. You have more guests than comfortable chairs. II. You serve messy foods on flimsy plates. III. Your television is just too small. IV. You allow people to channel surf. V. You invite people

who loathe football. CNS Illustration by Michael Anthony Noel. SUPER BOWL FUMBLES - VI. You let young kids go pigskin wild. VII. You shush people incessantly. VIII. You run out of key ingredients. IX. You keep the volume too low. X. You rush people out the door. CNS Illustration by Michael Anthony Noel. Ever try spooning baked beans off a napkin? That's what it's like eating sloppy fare off cheap paper plates, the kind that leave more food on a guest's white jersey than in his or her stomach. Leave the fine china in the cabinet, but at the very least spring for sturdy plastic dinnerware that won't spill a buffet's worth of grub on guests' threads - or worse, your carpet.

- Your TV is too small.

You don't need a screen the width of a football field, but an undersized tube will make it that much harder to recognize the players. No time to upgrade now, so transplant one or two extra sets from other rooms. If you don't own any, tell a friend to bring one instead of that awful bean dip even the dog won't eat.

- You rush people out the door.

It's late in the game. Tension is mounting. But instead of soaking up the drama, you're passing out jackets like a nightclub's coat-check guy at last call. Granted, you're tired from cooking and cleaning, but suck it up, Poindexter. Let your guests stay until the final gun, then a little while after that.

- You invite dissidents who loathe football.

We know, there are bigger things in life than who wins, who loses and who covers the spread. (Try that one on your bookie, though.) But the last thing football fanatics need are condescending elitists in their ears. Yes, football is boorish, but that's why we like it. That, and because it's the only thing besides Rocky movies that helps us remember Roman numerals. If you've got naysayers on your guest list, advise them to keep their moral objections quiet.

- You let young kids go pigskin wild.

Babies sure are precious. They're also smelly, cranky, noisy and liable to get drop-kicked out a window if they distract folks from the game. Don't let infants and toddlers crawl around in front of the TV; no one with nonmatching DNA will enjoy their antics. ("Look, the baby's staring aimlessly!" Big whup.) Set up a separate kids' area, or perhaps advise guests to get a baby sitter.

- You shush people incessantly.

There are "outdoor voices" and "indoor voices." And then there are "Super Bowl voices," which combine the two. A blown call or cheap shot calls for a good, cathartic yell. No, the refs can't hear taunts through the TV, but your guests will feel better for letting off steam. No one likes having Marian the Librarian shushing them all night long.

- You run out of key ingredients.

A truly naive host trusts the guests not just to bring food and drinks, but to bring the right kinds. But then Steve shows up with pretzels instead of corn chips, and suddenly the 5-gallon jug of salsa that Jill brought is more useless than your "Chicago Bears 2006 NFC Champs" shirt. Football may be a team game, but party planning is an individual sport. Don't rely on anyone else.

- You keep the volume too low.

Unless Joe Theisman's providing analysis, there's no need to mute the TV. The color commentary is as much a part of football as the game-ending Gatorade bath, and guests have a right to know which player missed a tackle, tipped a pass or got booked the previous night on solicitation charges. Don't make people strain to hear the broadcast.

- You allow people to channel surf.

Hide the remote. Seriously. There will be lulls in the action, but resist the urge to flip, lest you miss something spectacular. Even Super Bowl blowouts yield memorable moments, not to mention the commercials, which, though overrated, sometimes produce a chuckle.

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