

Joe Namath and Super Bowl III: An Interpretation of Style

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When Joe Namath and the New York Jets upset the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III, pro football crowned itself a new kind of hero. Namath became much more than a sports star, he became a super star, a celebrity of style. Within the context of the 1960s counter cultural movements, Namath's youth, brashness, and hedonism might appear to have made him a hero of dissent. Yet, the fact that he conformed to the game of football makes him look more like a mere cooptation of the values that the counter culture represented. This paper examines Namath as a popular cultural figure whose image is relevant in terms of these issues of enablement and constraint.

In looking at interpretations of Namath's style, this project focuses upon a single text, the N.F.L. Films highlight presentation of Super Bowl III. This is the officially sanctioned narrative of the game, and as such speaks with an authoritarian voice. Methodologically, this paper turns to William O'Neill's *Coming Apart* for an account of the 1960s counter culture. In terms of sport theory, I contrast Michael Novak's *The Joy of Sports* with Richard Gruneau's *Class, Sports and Social Development* to see how Namath achieves a heroic stature that is both liberating and oppressing. Finally, Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men* provides a useful context in which to view Namath's hedonism and playboy life style.

Namath confronts the cultural scholar with a style that both protests and conforms to dominant ideologies. His hedonism served to denigrate work and promote play, thereby affirming a mentality of consumerism. Yet, by wearing long hair, sideburns, and white shoes, he subverted a conservative game with styles that resonated with counter cultural sensibilities. In the end, Namath can be seen as a mediating figure in one aspect of the cultural conflicts that marked the 1960s with distinction.