

Snoop and Diddy headline a cast of stars destined to steal the spotlight from Super Bowl XLII

By Niki D'Andrea Published: January 31, 2008

Hip-hop star Ludacris is a football fan with a lot to say about the Super Bowl. He really wanted to see the Dallas Cowboys make the championship game, but since they didn't and it's Giants versus Pats, his money's on the Patriots when he comes to Glendale for the Super Bowl.



Snoop Dogg



Steven Reyes/iPhoto Diddy

He's less enthusiastic about the halftime show.

"Uh, yeah, I guess I'll probably watch it," he says. "Who's performing?"

Uh, Tom Petty.

Yes, that's right. The biggest cultural event in America — with an estimated 130 million viewers and fans paying \$3,000 for a seat in the upper level of University of Phoenix Stadium — has booked an aging rocker with a blond bob to headline the halftime show.

That's not to say there won't be amazing acts in town over Super Bowl weekend. Everyone from Paris Hilton to John Travolta is winging in for the Super Bowl, and though there's no guarantee they'll be pleased with the outcome of Sunday's football game, they definitely won't be bored.

Ludacris, Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, Ne-Yo, and Diddy are all performing — just not at the game. Petty's the sole performer for the halftime show, which skips hip-hop, one of the most popular music genres particularly among players like Patriots wide receiver Donté Stallworth and legendary 49ers wide receiver Jerry Rice.

So why isn't there hip-hop in the halftime show? Blame Janet





Scott Doctor / Splash News Snoop



Don't need no nasty girls: Don't dig Tom Petty? Blame Janet.



Ludacris



myspace.com/pokafase

Jackson's nipple, the quest for advertising dollars, and a fearful establishment.

"As well-received as hip-hop has been, it's still corporate America's nightmare, in that it can just as easily work against them," says Valley rapper Pokafase, who's performing with Diddy at the Super Thursday party at Axis/Radius in Scottsdale (full disclosure: *New Times* is sponsoring Super Thursday, and the marketing side of the paper is involved in many Super Bowl weekend activities). "The best representation of hip-hop is gonna be the parties around Super Bowl weekend."

Some stars, like Snoop Dogg, have a full dance card over the weekend. In addition to performing at the Anheuser-Busch Bud Bowl on Friday, Snoop will also bring his son's football team to Hamilton High School for the Snoop Bowl game that day. On Saturday, Snoop is scheduled to appear at the *Penthouse* Desire Super Party.

Ludacris has a full party plate, too.

"This show is gonna be a party," Ludacris says of his Saturday "Luda Bowl" at Celebrity Theatre. "I'll be there, and the whole DTP [Disturbing Tha Peace record label] family will be there, and that includes Bobby Valentino, Playaz Circle, and Willy Northpole. I'm looking forward to introducing Willy Northpole, because I know Phoenix is his hometown and he's been waiting to break out. And you never know, there might be some surprises, too." (Like, perhaps, Chingy and Lil Wayne, according to the press release.)

Halftime? Why bother. We'd rather be with Snoop Dogg at Axis/Radius for the Anheuser-Busch Bud Bowl.

Watching the Super Bowl halftime show over the past few years has felt a lot like watching that one crazy relative who used to be a party animal take a sip of a beer after years of sobriety. You remember how edgy and fun he used to be, but then he went too far one night and hit a tree, and he had to stay dry for a while. And even though he's nipping at the hair of the dog every now and then, he's just not as entertaining as he used to be — and so his current attempts at entertainment are just lame by comparison.

Super Bowl's sobering accident was the Nipplegate scandal of 2004, when Justin Timberlake broke into Janet Jackson's top and exposed her right breast to more than 144 million viewers, shocking the nation and costing Viacom (then-parent company of halftime show producer MTV) \$3.5 million in settlements for indecency complaints. Pokafase



Wyclef Jean



Caroline Grayshock Tom Petty, old white guy: ZZZZZZZZ

Then, the NFL announced that MTV would never produce another halftime show, ending the channel's budding, two-bowl legacy of explosive pop-culture productions.

"I think that, in general, celebrity culture has reached such a degrading level, and Nipplegate was over the top," says Elayne Rapping, a professor of media studies and popular culture at the University at Buffalo in New York. "Now, they want it to be more wholesome and all-American. They're pulling in the reins. The winds have shifted, and now we're getting a more wholesome event. I don't think anybody's gonna tear off Tom Petty's clothes."

Before that fateful day in 2004, Super Bowl halftime shows fit with the bombastic atmosphere of the event — big-name performers accompanied by dancers, fireworks, smoke machines, legions of lights, and sexy celebrities shaking their asses and just about everything else. The NFL and the networks had been making a deliberate effort to create a more dynamic show since 1992, when the halftime show — featuring Gloria Estefan and figure skaters Brian Boitano and Dorothy Hamill — lost around 25 million viewers to a special episode of *In Living Color*.

So in the spirit of evolving to a higher level of excitement than watching former Olympians do camel spins, halftime show producers booked acts like Michael Jackson (1993), James Brown (1997), Stevie Wonder (1999), and Christina Aguilera, Enrique Iglesias, and Toni Braxton (Disney's production in 2000).

MTV produced its first Super Bowl halftime show in 2001, an Emmynominated extravaganza that kicked off a four-bowl run of racier halftime shows. In addition to Britney Spears' pre-babies body and Mary J. Blige's attitudinal hotness, the halftime show featured a hip-hop performer for the first time ever — Nelly, whom MTV would bring back for its next (and last) halftime show in 2004.

For Super Bowl XXXVI in 2001, producer Clear Channel brought in U2, one of the biggest, flashiest bands in the world. The following year, Shania Twain, Sting, and No Doubt singer Gwen Stefani brought some sex appeal to the show.

Then Nipplegate. Not only was MTV's Super Bowl XXXVIII the most controversial of all halftime shows, but it was also the best, at least from a pop-culture standpoint. Every artist on the stage was a young, sexy, platinum-selling performer at the time: Jessica Simpson, Janet Jackson, Justin Timberlake, Nelly, P. Diddy, Kid Rock. But the "wardrobe malfunction" that led to a breast's bobbing in the air for all America to see was endgame for MTV, as it was for any sense of adventure for producers of future halftime shows.

Frankly, that sucks for advertisers, too.

"Clearly, advertisers want the halftime show to be raunchy," says James B. Twitchell, professor of English and advertising at the University of Florida. "When Janet Jackson's nipple was

exposed, that was the greatest thing that could have happened for them, because what's good for advertisers is what keeps people watching the show and watching the ads. If people think they might see something risqué or interesting in the halftime show, they'll watch. But if it's tame or predictable music, they're gonna go get a beer or talk with their friends during halftime."

"As an advertiser, you hope that whatever happens is interesting enough to hold people's attention," Twitchell adds. "What's more interesting than Janet Jackson's pastie?"

But CJ Comu, CEO of SUN Sports & Entertainment, a production company that's partnered with the NFL for 10 years to produce commemorative Super Bowl radios, says there's a reason halftime show producers don't want to book acts that are too hot or racy. "The networks that are broadcasting this are concerned about advertisers," Comu says. "Nobody wants to take any heat or flak when you have the most-viewed TV program in the country. So they're not not going to book somebody controversial, or somebody who's going to do anything that will reflect poorly on the networks."

Since Nipplegate, every Super Bowl halftime show has been a big scoop of vanilla that, though kinda tasty, could really use some sprinkles and syrup (not to mention a cherry). Since 2005, the halftime shows have all been produced by Don Mischer, a man who's won 13 Emmy Awards and produced everything from *The Kennedy Center Honors* to the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Mischer played it safe by booking Paul McCartney for Super Bowl XXXIX in '05, a man whose biggest "controversies" were checkbook-wrestling with Michael Jackson to buy the Beatles song catalog and marrying a much younger woman with a prosthetic leg. The following year, The Rolling Stones played a pretty straightforward halftime show, with Keith Richards looking less dead than he has in years.

There was more flamboyance last year, when Prince stepped onstage in the pouring, un-purple rain at Super Bowl XLI and wailed his way through a medley of searing guitar solos. The performance was stunning (and it earned Mischer two more Emmy nominations), but the risk factor with Prince is much lower now than it was in the '80s and '90s, when he was crawling naked out of a steamy tub in his videos and wearing bright yellow, tiger-striped assless chaps at the MTV Video Music Awards. These days, the artist formerly known as the artist formerly known as Prince is a Jehovah's Witness, so the chances that he'll hump the stage or simulate an orgasm with a vagina-shaped guitar aren't as great as the chance he may have a copy of *The Watchtower* handy.

Looking at this year's halftime show with Petty, there's clearly not an increase in producers' risk-tolerance levels.

"Tom Petty is classic rock, and that's a very different thing from Justin Timberlake," Rapping says. "Classic rock represents a period when America was in better shape. He's not controversial . . . I think they're playing it safe by not booking anybody who's going to stir up trouble. It does seem they want [the halftime show] to be a re-definition of what American culture is."

So why not book hip-hop at halftime? The Super Bowl is one of the most popular sporting events in this country, and hip-hop is one of the most popular music forms.

More than 155 radio stations in the U.S. are classified as "urban-formatted." In the past five years, of the 77 number one songs on the Billboard Hot 100 charts, at least 34, or about 44 percent, have been hip-hop songs.

With the exception of a 13-week run by Mariah Carey's "We Belong Together" in 2005, the longest consecutive runs at number one were 12-week streaks by Eminem's "Lose Yourself" and "Yeah," Usher's club banger featuring Lil' John and Ludacris.

Say what you will about numbers and figures, but they ultimately mean one thing: People are buying these records. Even last year, when Nas proclaimed "Hip-hop is dead," hip-hop records accounted for more than 18 million of the Recording Industry Association of America's certified sales.

"I don't see why they wouldn't have hip-hop in the halftime show," Ludacris says. "I think it's great they've had some hip-hop before, and they should have more in the future. Because hip-hop and sports go hand in hand. They motivate each other. A lot of hip-hop artists like football, and a lot of football players like hip-hop."

That certainly seems true, if some football players' iPod playlists are any indication. New England Patriots wide receiver Donté Stallworth told *The Boston Globe* he listens to Tupac Shakur and Young Jeezy songs to get pumped up before games. His playlist also includes 50 Cent, T.I., and Kanye West. Legendary wide receiver Jerry Rice (he won three Super Bowl rings with the San Francisco 49ers) gave a list of his top 10 iPod songs to <u>nbc11.com</u>, and it included songs by Ludacris, Jay-Z, Yung Joc, and Tupac. San Diego Chargers fullback Lorenzo Neal listens to 50 Cent before games.

Some former football stars have even tried to embark on careers as hip-hop stars. Former Tennessee Titans cornerback Adam "Pacman" Jones launched his own hip-hop label, National Street League Records, last year, with the first release coming from hip-hop duo Posterboyz (consisting of Jones and producer Spoaty). Former New York Giants cornerback Reggie Stephens is now known as rapper Famouz; he's got an album out on World Jam Records called *Ghetto Passport*.

In his column <u>"NFL buffoons leaving terrible legacy,"</u> foxsports.com columnist Jason Whitlock says that because 70 percent of NFL rosters consist of African-Americans, and because "hip-hop is the dominant culture for black youth," there's a large amount of "rebellion and buffoonery of hip-hop culture" and "hip-hop athletes" in the NFL. Whether or not you agree with his assertion that this is bad for the game, it seems logical to have a Super Bowl halftime show with some hip-hop stars in it.

Ludacris suspects the lack of hip-hop in this year's halftime show stems from producers' fears of controversy. "It seems like a lot of the people who make those decisions are scared of hip-hop," he says with a laugh.

But Brian McCarthy, a spokesman for the NFL, says there's been no conscious avoidance of hip-hop in halftime shows in the past, and there's only one reason there's no hip-hop act in the

show this year.

"We have one act for the halftime show, and one act only, and that is Tom Petty," he says.

"I can send you a list of the past 42 years, and you can see the diversity of acts. We have a Pepsi concert series that Mary J. Blige is playing this year, and Kanye West was in our concert series a few years ago," McCarthy adds. "2004 was a big hip-hop show, with Diddy and Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson — I'm sure you remember *that* one. We've also had Nelly a few times, and Eve, Kid Rock, and Alicia Keys. We had Britney one year. Those are not all obviously hip-hop, but we've worked with a wide variety of acts over the years."

For "obviously hip-hop" acts this year, fans will have to hit <u>the parties around the Valley</u>, like those at Axis/Radius, where Diddy performs on Thursday with Pokafase. "This show is huge. My executive producer, Miko Waydy, has been in this business a long time and has ties with Bad Boy [Diddy's label]," Pokafase says. "And when he got me on this show, I was excited. I'll be performing, and so will Next, a great hip-hop act, and then Diddy, who always puts on a spectacle."

As for how the halftime show stacks up against the parties, Pokafase says, "Honestly, it's gonna be a way better show at Axis/Radius."

When the red carpet rolls out across Phoenix, and everybody from Hugh Hefner to Justin Timberlake strolls down it, many Valley clubs will host a bombastic buffet of live hip-hop music. Meanwhile, back at University of Phoenix Stadium, a bunch of roadies will be assembling a stage for a halftime show that most people will be able to resist talking about at the water cooler on Monday.

Because, let's face it, Tom Petty's a legend who writes terrific tunes, but he's not flamboyant and exciting, and he never has been. He's always been the guy who just gets onstage and plays some great rock 'n' roll — minus the controversies and pyrotechnics — and sends you home ready to smoke a joint, eat a cookie, and go to sleep with the riff from "Runnin' Down a Dream" running through your head.

Thankfully, with all the hullabaloo surrounding Super Bowl weekend, it's easy to find a soiree that fits the sexy, supercharged vibe of the game better than Petty. Many people will be compelled to watch the show anyway, but while they're listening to Tom Petty sing "American Girl" (because that line about rolling another joint in "You Don't Know How It Feels" obviously won't fly), somewhere in the locker room, the Pats' Donté Stallworth will probably be jamming to Tupac Shakur and thinking about dinner with Diddy.

Who can blame him?