



Hello, everyone. We've been getting hit hard by snow recently, but if we can just hold on a bit longer, spring is just around the corner. Still, winters both in Niigata and my

home state of Michigan both feel and are very long. It's very common amid a combination of the cold and the lack of sunlight for people to sink into an almost depression-like state during the period of February to March. While there is a clinical term, Seasonal Affective Disorder, even those without such a condition can have their moods affected by the weather, and thus we should all be on guard for our own psychological health. So, what sort of hobbies or other activities do you do to bide the time until spring comes?

One such hobby in America is football. This may be a term you're familiar with, but the final game of the football season to decide the national champions, the Super Bowl, is held in early spring. Every year, the Super Bowl is consistently far and away the most-watched program on television, similar to Japan's Kouhaku Utagassen. Last year's super bowl secured first place with over 11 million viewers. The second place for that year was only 480000 viewers, and even that was another football game.

The Super Bowl isn't just for football fans, though. There are many factors to the game other than the sports aspects that draw in viewers. That's where the commercials come in. I just told you about the incredible number of viewers watching the Super Bowl, so you can understand why many companies go all-out creating interesting, funny, or just impressive commercials to play during the game. The full broadcast lasts around 4 hours, but out of that time almost an hour is just commercials. Also, the cost of these commercials will amaze you: \$5 million per 30 seconds. Granted, your commercial is going to be seen by tens of millions of people, but that's still an awful lot of money.



One more aspect of the Super Bowl is the food. In typical American style, people put a lot of time, effort, and money into cooking the food for their parties. Even for an American like me, the colossal amount of food eaten on Super Bowl Sunday is just unbelievable:

- 1.3 billion chicken wings
- 1.3 million pizzas
- 5 million kilograms of potato chips
- 3.8 million kilograms of pop corn
- 14 billion hamburgers

Good grief, right? It doesn't take much thought to figure out why 6% of Americans take the next day off of work. When I went to America last October, I took my wife to a football game at my old high school. It was the first game she had ever seen, and she wasn't too certain about the rules (in fairness, even I'm not very knowledgeable), but she still could understand the mania surrounding football in America. Call it intensity, or energy, whatever you will, but football is just plain exciting. If you have some free time, try watching a football game on the internet some day. Football is very important to American culture, and in the same way there are many sports all over the world that are unique to their areas. Sports, and play in general, are big aspects of culture, and being familiar with global sports is a great step towards international understanding. Video sites are all over the internet, so its easier than ever to search for new things.

Seems like I strayed a bit from my original topic, so please take care of your health, both physically and mentally, during the relentless winter weather of late. If you need to warm up, you can always try making the chili recipe I posted last time. Until next time, Jeff

