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I provide aid and comfort to the World Economic Forum

Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—I returned from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland this week. The conference gathers big shots from business, politics and non-governmental organizations each year to get to know each other and talk about whose private jet is the longest.

I gave a presentation on forecasting, “Big Gaffes and Bigger Guffaws.” Any fool, I said, could predict the predictable. I then offered my list.

Real talent lies in predicting things that take unfettered imagination—big leaps from nowhere and nothingness into, one hopes, somewhere and somethingness. I’m known for making such leaps in the sense of jumping off, not in the sense of landing on both feet.

I asked my seminar to give me examples of what I might be talking about. After a long silence, the president of the world’s largest soda company asked when I thought sugar would finally be accepted as a health food.

Then, I was asked which team -- Baltimore Ravens or San Francisco 49ers -- would win the Super Bowl on Sunday. That led to the questions and answers that follow:

Questioner: Good morning. I am the High Sultan of Squat. As everyone knows, I control 53 percent of the world’s oil production. We Squatters have worked hard to create the oil beneath our dunes for the benefit of all humanity. How much oil do you think the world will need in the coming year?

Me: Even money, it will need more. How much more depends.

Questioner: Depends on what?

Me: On things that happen. Everybody knows that.

Questioner: Like tell me one thing?

Me: Like how much Beijing enjoys suffocating on air pollution of its own making. But the real game will be played sideline to sideline. You know, East-West, not North-South.

Questioner: I see. You talk like Alan Greenspan.

Me: My American idol. A man whose prose was a beacon in the night.

Questioner: It's no surprise that the United States and China are locked in a struggle for control of the world's resources. How do you think this will play out? Who do you think will win?

Me: Every game has four quarters. And for that matter, so does every dollar. The Chinese have fewer quarters per yuan than we have quarters per dollar. That's because they maintain a devalued currency.

The team that has scored more points at the end of the game will win.

The most critical resources of today will not be the most critical resources of tomorrow. For reasons of security, I'd recommend drafting truly offensive guards rather than quarterbacks who throw good passes after bad and don't guard anything.

Questioner: All of us are looking at China's economy. The GDP growth forecasts for 2013 are all over the lot, ranging from an 8.12 percent gain to as much as 8.43 percent? What do you think?

Me: I think they have to run the ball and pass the ball, too.

Questioner: I understand, and I have to say that I agree.

Me: Some have questioned their play-calling, especially in short-yardage situations where they like to use Trotsky as a decoy and give it to their sectarian split end. The Chinese are not your father's Maoists—that's for sure.

Questioner: Your 2013 GDP forecast?

Me: They have a lot of weapons, but, eventually, they fall apart in their huddle. Just once, I'd like to see their quarterback call an audible at the line. But, instead, the head coach says: "Do it my way or the highway." They need to trust their players to make some plays with their hats on. You asked, so I'm going to go wild on GDP: 8.44 percent!

Questioner: The boldness...it leaves me dizzy.

Questioner: There have been a lot of stories about Lloyd Blankfein of Goldman Sachs, Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase and other CEOs of the big American banks suffering from chronic head injuries after spending their careers being blindsided by the liberal media. First, do you think these guys are bonkers from occupational injuries? And second, what changes do you recommend to make investment banking safer for its players in the future?

Me: I don't think sleazy should be confused with bonkers. It's true that these CEOs have had their bells rung Monday through Friday. Head trauma explains some of their behavior, but the culture of their workplaces explains most of it. You can't defend criminal behavior by pleading bonkers.

Name me one giant investment bank that is run by a guy who could make a living scooping ice cream. Who would trust them dipping out the assets? It takes an honest guy to scoop up.

I wish these guys would run investment banks, which we need, not betting parlors, which we don't.

Questioner: You're blaming the victims.

Me: Let me put it simply. There's always a danger when you throw over the middle. The only truly safe place on the field is out of bounds. So it comes as no surprise that Blankfein, Dimon and the rest are trying to sneak in as much off-field yardage as they can. The refs blow a really slow whistle when they see these guys running plays outside the chalk lines.

Questioner: But won't the fans see that?

Me: People see what they're told to see.

Questioner: I AM Lloyd Blankfein, and I can say without qualification that I can scoop ice cream better than a bald-headed blowhard like you.

Me: OK. I concede the point, Mr. Double Dip.

Blankfein: The trouble with the American economy is that we are playing on a level playing field with each other. We need to uneven things up and move the goal posts closer when needed.

Me: I can see where that would help. So what's your advice on where to put money this year?

Blankfein: We're advising our clients to bet on going long in the flat. Of course, we're taking the other side of that bet to help out.

Me: What about going down the middle?

Blankfein: The only thing in the middle are rule enforcers—hit men, if you will, and some day, even hit women. I'm told they're mating and producing a breed of zebra-striped hit children. The game, today, is rife with unwanted penalties, particularly holding and interference.

Me: So what are you long in? What do you think will work?

Blankfein: Misdirection plays. We stick with our bread and butter.

Questioner: I run Appelite in Silicon Valley. How will technology change the world?

Me: Well, we all pull our pants on one leg at a time. And we all put our shoes on after we put our socks on. And you need to do both to function in the world. What I'm saying is that you win the game between your ears.

Questioner: Far out! Do you want to work for me?

Me: Some technologies won't change the world.

Questioner: So other technological changes will?

Me: The game is still about fundamentals—blocking, tackling, grabbing jerseys when the refs aren't looking, cheap head shots on defenseless players. One guy trying to physically and sexually dominate another.

Questioner: Really! I never knew.

Me: The NFL is not introspective. Most coaches don't emphasize the psycho-sexual aspect of the game. They're more into the touchy-feely stuff.

Technology changes are coming. On-field texting. Flying cleats. Goal posts that wear their emotions on their crossbeam. Pretty soon Scotty will beam up injured players directly to the hospital for MRIs and dim sum.

Put your money on loose change, which is more dependable than the dollar.

Questioner: Any professional sport that gets away with calling its ball a "pigskin" when it's cowhide leather can teach high tech a thing or two about marketing.

Questioner: I run the Global Total Domination Fund, which is known affectionately among my friends in Davos as "Edgy Hedgy." We embrace risk. We are not afraid of losing our investors' capital. Our mission is to gain control of the world's best land, because no one's making any more of it.

Me: He who owns the land between the hash marks makes his money off the concession stands.

Questioner: My question is this: Who will object to us buying every square inch that's for sale?

Me: It'll be the guys who buy the pennants and popcorn.

Questioner: The U.S. does not have a sovereign wealth fund to help pay pensions. Norway has the biggest SWF in the world. Are they out of our league?

Me: The Super Bowl will prove that we can play with anyone in the world, including ourselves. Do you really think that a gaggle of broken-down Vikings could run with the Ravens for 60 minutes?

Questioner: The only people who care about pensions are those who need one. That's a skewed sample in my book. Pensions corrupt character in my book.

Me: What book is that?

Questioner: The one I'm writing—Book of the Doomed.

I collected written evaluations from the 12 participants who lasted the 30-minute seminar with me. I don't know the thoughts of the 238 who left.

"It doesn't get any deeper than this."

"I heard you give dancing lessons, too. Any survivors?"

"I head up Intergalactic Equities for JPMorgan Chase. We will squash you. Repent."

"You're dead wrong about China's GDP in 2013. It will be up 8.42 percent, not 8.44."

"Great routine. How are your bird calls?"

"More pungent than cute."

"I hate people who try to be funny. Stick to the grim and grimy."

"Get in touch with me if you want a 40% yield over the next week."

"Don't call. Don't twitter. Don't email. Don't write."

I'd like to kick your can farther down the road."

"49ers by six."

"How does your wife put up with you?"

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