

CORONA GAMES by JAY RICH

A physician and an entertainer discuss challenges in managing a life-threatening pandemic as if it's a game: empathy for the herd versus individual freedoms

(action starts on a sound stage where an entrepreneur Sporty is recording the discussion for marketing purposes by turning up the drama while minimizing simple science. He is interested in making money in the emerging field of INFODEMICS, not informing behavior change or saving the herd)

CHARACTERS

Goodman Sportz: typical sports enthusiast and media mogul; handsome, fit early 40s male, a sloppy dresser, who goes by nickname, Sporty

Ignaz Semmelweis, MD: a Hungarian academic Obstetrician with significant early work on infection control to reduce maternal deaths in childbirth; Meticulously groomed with immaculate 3-piece suit, Italian tie and handmade shoes

Rush Limbaugh, Contemporary American Shock Jocks, talk show host, writer, media consultant; overweight, short of breath, ruddy complexion and ill-fitting sports jacket, no tie

SETTING

The California production studio of Goodman Sportz, includes a small sound stage, cameras and recording equipment, and a typical sleek modern California office with desk, chairs, file cabinets, massive amount of computer equipment for editing sound bites and monitoring news/information channels

TIME

Now

CONFLICT

Popular Influence: *Science and data based critical information versus popular entertainment*

PLOT

Goodman Sportz, a businessman profiting from conflict, disagreement and influential opinions stages recording of high-profile personalities for debate, banter and entertainment purposes

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(sound stage, production recording in process)

Sporty: I'm Goodman Sportz, call me 'Sporty'. I've had many nicknames.....first bully on the playground tried to brand me with "goody, goody two shoes" but I quickly beat the shit out of him, and he never repeated it.

Semmelweis: Please call me Iggy.

Sporty: You Europeans are always so formal; do you think we can talk fast together today?

Semmelweis: Of course, these ideas are very important to me, I know these subjects well.

You know my work was severely criticized when first shared with the medical community in Vienna? Specifically, my work on reducing maternal death in childbirth was ignored for decades.....many women died.

Sporty: (over talks the cautious Dr. Semmelweis comment, 'many women died')

Of course, Iggy, of course! That's exactly why you're here. This is California, this is the USA. baby. We need drama to reach the masses. That bitch, Kelly Anne Conway has the deluxe gig at the White House, she's making millions just by "helping the President" "control the narrative", "present alternative facts". Two fucking ideas, two concepts.....she's putting the rest of us in the outfield, some of us are even benched for good. The guys don't like it at all.

Semmelweis: Outfield?.....Benched?

Sporty: Oh, sorry Iggy, outfield as in baseball outfield, the less important positions. And benched is on the bench, not in any of the action. We all want to be pitchers, on the mound, in all the action.....controlling ALL the narrative, as if Donnie's narratives can be controlled. (Rush and Sporty both burst out laughing spontaneously, simultaneously with knowing, deep eye contact)

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Okay, Iggy, we're on a short timeline here, as I said before, Rush has an afternoon taping. Fast news here. Fast food, fast news. We good?

Semmelweis: (formally delivered) Yes, we are good.

Sporty: My job this morning is to sample opposing views of strong personalities. Rush and his staff do this extensively and he's helping me fine tune the process, how to influence the masses. He's made millions simply being rude and vulgar. It's a different world out there. None of you scientists have hit shows and networks are hiring any "doctor" talking head who will say what they want you to know.

(continues, directing staff to mark a hard restart for editing purposes; turns to deliver a cheery opening to the cameras)

Good morning folks. We are here today with two interesting personalities to discuss science and entertainment. Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis is a Hungarian researcher and obstetrician joining us from the Vienna General Hospital. His early work included uncovering causes and treatments for young mother's deaths after childbirth. Our own American star, Rush Limbaugh is a popular entertainer reaching the masses on radio, TV and blogs with his anger. He has role modeled angry reactivity for large groups of men and recently accepted the Presidential Medal of Freedom Award.

My work is here with Goodman Sportz Studios and I'll direct. Welcome to Corona Games, pick your side: hard scientific data or dramatic entertainment. We know your attention spans are short and you have thousands of media choices. So, let's get started.

Dr. Semmelweis, you're up! Tell us about your background, research and what you want.

Semmelweis: Thank you for inviting me. I've very willing to share all I know. My early family life was in Hungary where my father had a business sourcing, distributing and selling spices and food commodities. It was a wonderful time, culture was very rich, diverse and interactive.

Sporty: Get to your points Iggy, get to your points please.

Semmelweis: I spent a year at law school and realized early that there is no humanity in word games of lawyers. I shifted to the science of medicine which wasn't that connected to humanity at that time, but I respected and enjoyed talking with all types of people. My career evolved to the point of a residency at Vienna General in obstetrics. Our population was wayward women, single, poverty level women who sought out our free clinics. I noticed immediately that the death rates of our two clinics were dramatically different, as high as 15 percent when I started.

Limbaugh: (interrupts aggressively) I don't believe you. How do you know they were dead?

Semmelweis: Dead bodies are cold, Mr. Limbaugh, dead mothers leave crying babies. Anyway, that's one out of seven women died of puerperal fever, childbirth fever shortly after delivery. We started using scientific method to sort causes and treatments. Academic physicians at that time would perform autopsies in the mornings before rounds. They would examine women approaching labor and delivering without washing their hands. The only other variable at the time was priests who came through the wards with incense but that finding was easily dismissed. Our two clinics were teaching environments for two groups, physicians in training and midwives in training. The midwives' death rates were much lower. I theorized that there was a transfer of cadaverous poisonings by the first group. I established a hand washing protocol with chlorinated lime after autopsies. The hand washing worked; death rates were consistently below 1 percent. I spent the rest of my career trying to get physicians to wash their hands. They were too proud and didn't believe me. I was ridiculed, harassed and ignored. (pause, then different prayer like energy) The most miraculous, sacred, joyful medical procedure of all time, childbirth, and the men wouldn't change.....(uncomfortable silence, Limbaugh twists in his chair, Sporty looks away). Scientific method meant nothing to them.

Limbaugh: Heh Sporty, Iggy doesn't know does he. Men are responsible for the borders, the big picture, the big hunt, the wars. Women are supposed to do the rest.

Sporty: To get back to your point Iggy, you're saying that your physician colleagues didn't want to listen to science? They wanted to listen to their patients instead?

Semmelweis: (activated, sharp and highly energized in a different way, not his usual formal reserve)

Mr. Sport, let me clarify. They were so powerful they didn't feel they needed to listen to either science or their patients. They didn't TRY to listen to their patients! Hundreds of young women came to the clinics with fear and apprehension..... They easily revealed that they knew the death rates were high. They avoided us because they knew. Many delivered their babies in the streets, then presented with a story that they 'didn't know their bodies' and the 'delivery process'. They needed to qualify for childcare benefits and needed us to sign off on that. Of course, we did. They were very brave to risk birth in the street compared with birth at the hands of power men who couldn't wash their hands.

In this age of corona pandemic, observation is the first way to examine patients. I can't help but notice that Mr. Limbaugh's breathing is shallow and mildly distressed. Rush, I left my oximeter in my hotel room or I'd check your O2 stats immediately. This looks like more than being out of shape.

Sporty: Rush, you're up.

Limbaugh: Thanks, Sporty. My thing is keep 'em interested, if they glaze over with the painful details, I'm not doing my job. Don't go too far 'scientist' on us Iggy, oximeter poximeter. Men need emotional coaches. I say things that they are thinking but can't say. I appeal to repressed rage that has no outlet. My father was a lawyer and fighter pilot. If you can't kill them with bullets, stun them with angry words. Grandfather, brother and uncle were also lawyers, wordy wordy word guys. I couldn't get a

word in edgewise, so I learned snark. That's been my education, Snark University, a college all men want to attend. The wordy wordy word guys couldn't express much of any emotion directly.

Family dinners, they were always lecturing, pontificating. It didn't keep my attention, you've got to shift the game, go for the throat, take charge of the narrative. I knew that decades before that bitch Kellyanne Conway came along. I went to college for 2 semesters and..... as my mother has reported publicly, 'failed everything'. She didn't know I was researching Sorority girls. I established the well-known catch and release program. I learned to avoid feminazis. They'd bust your balls, then expect you to share feelings. So I hung out with guys, some of the athletes had serious injuries and got into drugs. I started taking pain pills with them to be part of the group and got addicted. Another way of shutting down anger.

Sporty: You're getting tangential Rush, pull it back to our topic. How does science integrate with entertainment?

Limbaugh: Yes, of course. The current corona virus is a common cold virus that has been exaggerated. The scientists can't keep the narrative clear and everyone has too much fear. Hell, take it on. Build the herd immunity. Only way to go. Donnie and Jared are trying their damndest to monetize it but they're in trouble. They needed the bail out, Jared got them overextended with the test kit. We know it's beyond stay at home, wash your hands, cover your face. It can't be that simple. It's a hoax. Out of work actors are playing doctor and nurse for the cameras. It's an elaborate sound stage that Cuomo has in New York City.

Sporty: Rush, I thought we had discussed this when you signed the contract. We need to integrate science with entertainment. You said you were in.

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Limbaugh: I lied, I'm a shock jock. I can't do this. Timing is too rich to ignore; my ratings are up.

Donnie's given me the award of my life. My fourth wife hasn't left me. If she does, I know the catch and release maneuver. I can't integrate anything.

Sporty: word on the street is you have stage four lung cancer from smoking.

Semmelweis: Mr. Limbaugh, your breathing is shallow and mildly distressed. When excited your face turns bright red and your breathing quickens.

Limbaugh: Bullshit, it's lies. Those media people have it out for me. They want my ratings.

Sporty: there have been sightings of you in cancer treatment.

Limbaugh: That's a crock. I was doing charity work.

Sporty: Please, sit with us. Be with us. Now as long as I've known you, you've carried extra weight, if you have cancer at your age and you're out of shape, you're high risk for death from corona virus. We need your help in influencing change.

Limbaugh: I don't give a shit. Some will die, I won't.

Sporty: Be here Rush, be with us. You're drifting somewhere else. You're losing our audience.

Limbaugh: I've got to see my jackass friend in Iowa with the hog processing plant. He puts hundreds of workers in confined space doing heavy manual labor which requires heavy breathing. And they wonder why so many caught the virus. I suppose many are also undocumented. So much for Donnie's wall. The guy's got 30 semi loads of pork waiting to get delivered. If he doesn't close his deal within minutes, it all goes to dogfood producers for pennies on the dollar. Talk about sourcing and selling food commodities, it's business Iggy, it's goddam business. Bacon, bacon who's selling the bacon?

Sporty: Time for closing remarks. Dr. Semmelweis, you're first.

Semmelweis: I came here with the expectation that Americans respect scientists and listen to them. Your media devalues your top scientists and the masses threaten their lives. Your shock jocks have managed to raise doubt and confusion about simple infection control. Your death rate is highest in the world and climbing. Your top representatives are short of breath and out of shape, merely sitting in front of a camera, talking. Not lifting dead bodies into a makeshift morgue or throwing hog carcasses on a production line. On the other side of your INFOentertainment culture your audience is sitting on the couch, passive. I think your term is couch potato. Two hundred years ago, I dealt with these same issues with gentlemen physicians, too passive, too proud, too detached to wash their hands. Sad how things haven't evolved, people aren't willing to take action for the group.

Sporty: Mr. Limbaugh, closing remarks.

Limbaugh: You gotta die of something. I was never close to my grandmothers, if they die, no biggie. You can always find lonely old ladies. I was socialized by power men and word games. Competition for position and status helped me professionally and I win Iggy. And how do you know those street girls weren't just working the system? How do you know they're alive?

Semmelweis: They carry smiling, babbling babies with pride. They survived. They evolved. Their sisters didn't have the chance. It's not business or power Mr. Limbaugh, it's evolution and humanity.

Limbaugh: I'm outa here.