

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard lighting a cigarette with a match. The man's face is partially visible on the left, and his hands are in the center. The background is dark and out of focus. The image is split diagonally, with the top right portion being black and containing the magazine title.

TEENTIMES 30

FOR THE YOUTH, BY THE YOUTH!

MARCH 2025



Huff, puff and legalize?

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MARCHING OK, BUT TO WHAT END?

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Thrills and Triumphs: St. Dominic High School Sports Day 2025

BY LEHAR MARATA

A competitive atmosphere filled the hallways of St. Dominic High School from the start of the school's thirtieth year. All students were divided into four different "houses": Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue. Throughout the year, these houses competed against each other in weekly mini-games and sports competitions. However, the ultimate battle came on February 14, during the

school's annual Sports Day, where each house had a final chance to flaunt their skills and earn points.

The sports event began with an opening speech and prayer by the management team, followed by a workout led by a few IB Biology students to ensure all athletes were properly warmed up. Afterward, the real competition began. The first event was cheerleading, where each house presented their creative cheerleading routines. The stands were filled with cheers, posters, and bright smiles as the cheerleaders showcased their talents.

Next came the moment the athletes had been waiting for. A series of sporting events commenced, starting with running races of various distances. These were followed by dodgeball, an obstacle course, football, and volleyball competitions, finally ending with the relay races.

The highlight of the day was the relay race, where teams demonstrated teamwork and determination, bringing the crowd to their feet in excitement.

Winners of each competition were noted down, and points were earned for their houses. Despite the intense competition, the students displayed incredible sportsmanship, shaking hands and congratulating each other after every event. The points accumulated throughout the day ultimately helped determine the winning team: Red House! Each winner was awarded a medal or certificate during the awards ceremony on February 19, and of course, Red House proudly flaunted their well-deserved trophy.

The series of competitive events reminded the student body of their unity, as they cheered not only for their own teams but also for their friends in other teams. This year's Sports Day brought



out the best in the students, whether athletic or not, and ended on a high note with well-earned victories and a strong sense of school spirit. Kudos to the entire committee for making the event successful and enjoyable for all!



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FROM FEAR TO OPPORTUNITY: MAKING AI WORK FOR EDUCATION

BY JAIME SAAVEDRA AND EZEQUIEL MOLINA

As education experts at the World Bank—and, more importantly, as parents—we deeply understand the apprehension surrounding artificial intelligence in our classrooms. These fears aren't abstract for us; they're personal. Like many parents and educators, we grapple with questions about how these technologies will shape the next generation's learning experience.

The fear is not unfounded. We are witnessing what some call the most significant technological revolution in history—at least on the level of the steam engine or electricity. AI could also be the most transformative force in education since the printing press. Critics raise valid concerns about its impact on equity, effectiveness, and the very nature of learning it-

gramme, guided by teachers, significantly improved students' math skills—at just US \$18 per student. Ignoring this opportunity would only widen existing educational disparities.

2. How do we ensure AI serves our communities rather than the other way around?

Concerns about technological sovereignty are legitimate. Since AI systems are primarily developed in the Global North, they often fail to address crucial local needs—such as native language content and culturally relevant teaching approaches. But the solution isn't rejection; it's strategic engagement.

We need concrete actions:

- Developing local AI talent through

ing. But technology, like fire, can either cook your meal or burn down your house—it all depends on how we use it.

Let's be honest: students have been finding shortcuts since the invention of writing. Whether asking a smart sibling for help or copying homework, cheating is nothing new. What's different now is not the behavior but the sophistication of the tools. This presents an opportunity to rethink how we teach and assess learning.

AI can help us focus on what truly matters: developing higher-order thinking, creativity, and critical analysis. Preliminary findings from our pilot programmes in Nigeria show something fascinating—when students are properly guided, AI tools

Here's a startling reality: while medical research rapidly influences healthcare practices, educational research often struggles to reach classrooms. AI can help change this.

We must adopt the same evidence-based approach used in medicine, pharmaceuticals, and food safety—moving forward thoughtfully without being paralyzed by fear of innovation. Just as no medical procedure or food additive is introduced without proper testing, AI in education should follow a systematic approach:

- Establishing clear regulatory frameworks for AI use
- Conducting rigorous evaluations before large-scale implementation
- Iteratively adapting AI tools based on real-world results
- Ensuring active participation from



self. But AI is already embedded in most aspects of life, which is precisely why we must confront these challenging questions head-on.

Here, we address four critical questions we hear from educators, parents, and policymakers across Latin America:

1. Isn't promoting AI irresponsible when many schools lack the basics?

This is a false choice. Yes, many schools still lack fundamental infrastructure and well-qualified teachers. But properly implemented technology can help close these gaps faster. AI can enhance teacher training, rapidly distribute high-quality learning materials to remote areas, and provide personalized support to students who need extra help.

The evidence is promising. In Ecuador, an AI-assisted tutoring pro-

scholarships and specialized training

- Partnering with experts to create culturally relevant educational content
- Establishing clear regulatory frameworks that protect data sovereignty
- Providing comprehensive digital training for teachers

Uruguay has already demonstrated what's possible. The country has developed AI guidelines that respect local teaching methods while leveraging technological advances—ensuring that AI serves educational goals, not the other way around.

3. Won't students just use AI to avoid real learning?

This is one of the most pressing concerns we hear from teachers and parents. There's a valid fear that tools like ChatGPT will become crutches, leading to intellectual laziness and superficial learn-

actually deepen engagement with material.

Instead of assigning simple text summaries (which AI can generate instantly), teachers can ask students to critique AI-generated analyses, compare different interpretations, or use AI as a brainstorming partner to refine their own ideas.

And here's the key insight: great teachers have always fostered critical thinking through thoughtful discussions. But any parent of teenagers knows how hard it is to encourage deep thinking—now imagine doing it with 30 students at once! AI can help teachers create more effective lesson plans and activities to develop these essential skills.

4. How do we implement AI responsibly in schools?

Education urgently needs more scientific evidence on what works.

educators and communities in shaping AI policies

The Path Forward

The future of education will inevitably be shaped by technological change. If we act wisely, we can use these tools to support schools, teachers, and students—especially those who need it most. Success depends on smart investments and keeping the human element at the center of education.

At its core, education is about human interaction. AI should enhance this interaction, making it more effective and engaging, but it should never replace it. By staying true to this principle, we can ensure that technology strengthens education rather than undermining it.

Future

YOUTH MARCHING TO NOWHERE

In recent times, the streets of Sint Maarten have seen powerful displays of unity as young people, teachers, and community leaders march against youth violence. These marches are a vital expression of concern—a collective cry for help. But if we're being completely honest, what has changed? Despite passionate speeches, banners, and media coverage, fights continue to break out inside and outside schools, and youth delinquency remains a pressing issue. The hard truth is that while marches raise awareness, awareness alone won't solve the problem.

We've said it before, and we'll say it again: If the socio-economic issues affecting young people on this country are not addressed, nothing will change. Teen Times has even submitted a white paper to the government outlining these very issues. The country's youth are growing up in a pressure cooker of economic struggles, social instability, and lack of opportunity. Until those root causes are tackled, marches will remain symbolic acts—marching for marching's sake.

Understanding Socio-Economic Issues and Youth Behaviour

Socio-economic issues are the unseen forces shaping a young person's life, influencing their choices, behaviour, and outlook on the future. When we talk about youth violence or delinquency, we're not just discussing bad decisions or poor discipline—we're talking about survival. We're talking about how poverty, unemployment, the high cost of living, and lack of access to mental health services directly affect teens.

Poverty and Financial Struggles

The cost of living in Sint Maarten has skyrocketed in recent years. Food, rent, utilities, and school supplies cost more than many families can afford. When parents struggle to pay the bills, that stress trickles down to their children, creating unstable home environments where tensions run high and basic needs are not always met.

A hungry teen isn't thinking about conflict resolution or self-discipline—they're thinking about where their next meal will come from. That frustration often turns into aggression, especially in environments where young people feel powerless.

Unemployment and Underemployment

Many parents work two or three jobs just to make ends meet. Long hours mean less supervision at home, leaving teens to raise themselves. The lack of quality family time leads to feelings of neglect, loneliness, and abandonment—emotions that often manifest in disruptive behaviour.

When parents are unemployed or underemployed, the entire household suffers. Teens may feel obligated to contribute financially and, without job opportunities, some turn to illegal activities for income. This cycle repeats itself, deepening the crisis.



Education Inequality

The country's schools are underfunded and overcrowded, with many lacking the proper resources to support students. Guidance counsellors are too few, and mental health services are practically non-existent. If a student struggles academically or emotionally, there's often nowhere for them to turn.

When education systems fail to provide support, students fall through the cracks. They feel like they have no future—and when you believe you have no future, you're more likely to act out in the present.

Lack of Recreational Facilities and After-School Programmes

It's not enough to tell young people to "stay off the streets" if there's nowhere else for them to go. St. Maarten desperately needs more safe spaces where teens can spend their free time productively. Sports programmes, creative arts clubs, and mentorship initiatives can help redirect youth energy into something positive.

Without these outlets, boredom, frustration, and peer pressure push many teens to hang out on the block—where trouble often finds them.

Mental Health Crisis

Socio-economic struggles often lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and anger. Yet, there is still a massive stigma around mental health

in our community. Counselling services are limited, expensive, or simply inaccessible to many families.

Teens dealing with trauma, family conflict, or emotional pain have nowhere to turn. Their internal battles manifest as fights, defiance, and other destructive behaviours.

Addressing the Root Causes

If Sint Maarten truly wants to tackle youth delinquency, it must start by addressing these socio-economic issues head-on. Here's what needs to happen:

Affordable Housing and Living Costs –

The government must implement policies that make life more affordable for families. Start with rent, utilities, and food—then watch things change like magic. The studies are there. The examples exist. We're not reinventing the wheel.

Job Creation Programmes –

Provide both parents and youth with opportunities for stable employment.

Mental Health Services –

Invest in affordable, accessible counselling for both teens and families.

Youth Centres and After-School Programmes –

Create more safe spaces where young people can channel their energy.

Education Reform –

Improve the quality of education and ensure every

school has the necessary support systems in place.

Marches Are Important, But Not Enough

This isn't to say that youth marches have no value. They serve an important purpose—they raise awareness, empower young people to use their voices, and show solidarity against violence. They are a necessary starting point. But without action, they are hollow.

We wish the organizers of these marches the best of luck. It's inspiring to see young people standing up for what they believe in. However, it's time to shift the conversation from awareness to action. The message to those in power needs to be loud and clear: *Stop addressing the symptoms and start curing the disease. Stop marching with us and start mattering to us.*

Until the socio-economic struggles of Sint Maarten's families are addressed, youth violence will persist. Marches will continue to be organized, posters will continue to be waved, and hashtags will continue to trend—but nothing will truly change.

Fix the system first, and then watch how youth behaviour follows. Anything else is just marching for marching's sake.



DIVING INTO MR. FONTENELLE

At just 17 years old, Nigel Fontenelle is proving that dedication, hard work, and passion can take you far — even across the globe. From starting swimming at the age of six to representing Sint Maarten on the international stage in Budapest, Nigel has shown remarkable commitment to both his sport and his education. With a love for biology and a drive to excel in everything he does, Nigel balances the demands of training six times a week while aiming to make his country and his family proud. In this exclusive Q&A with Teen Times, Nigel opens up about his journey, the lessons he learned in Budapest, and the importance of support for athletes in smaller sporting disciplines like swimming.

Tell us about yourself

My name is Nigel Fontenelle, and I am 17 years old, born on February 10, 2008. My favourite colours are purple and blue. My favourite subject in school is currently science, mainly biology, because I love to learn about new things and analyse the Earth, especially things we don't even see. I find it very interesting. I started swimming at the age of 6 and joined a swim team to do competitive swimming at the age of seven, with my favourite stroke currently being butterfly.

How often do you train?

I train six times a week, Monday through Sunday, except Thursdays. I also go to the gym on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings.

What are your goals in life?

My goals in life are to excel in what I do. I want to excel in both school and swimming. One of my biggest goals is to make my mom proud and happy because it makes me happy and motivates me to continue what I do.

Do you see yourself becoming a professional swimmer?

Yes, I see myself becoming a professional swimmer. Sometimes it gets hard to balance school and swimming, but no matter how many times I fall, I will always get back up and continue doing what I do.

Tell us about your months and training leading up to Budapest

In the months leading up to Budapest, I trained hard almost every day since September, prioritizing my swimming because I was preparing for something really big. I kept in mind that I didn't want to disappoint anyone, so I just trained hard for it.



What did you learn from your experience in Budapest?

What I learned from my experience in Budapest is that the athletes there do not come to play. World records were being broken left and right throughout my time there, and it was amazing to watch. I hope to put myself in that position someday, making Sint Maarten proud.

What advice would you like to give the Minister of Sports?

The advice I would give to the Minister of Sports is to be more supportive. Make swimming more known as a sport on our island. As young swimmers, we need motivation and support due to the mental endurance required for this sport. If there was more support, it could motivate the few international swimmers that Sint Maarten has to keep going and work harder.

Swimming is an individual sport. When you are in the water, your thoughts are on the people you can make proud, whether it's by placing 3rd, or maybe even 1st, in a heat. Motivation pushes us harder, and having a support system cheering

you on before you dive and when you touch the wall at the end of a race makes it all worthwhile. It's just a great feeling overall.



Feature

ADAYA BOURNE MAKING WAVES FOR SINT MAARTEN

At just 17 years old, Adaya Bourne is already making a name for herself as one of Sint Maarten's most promising athletes. A competitive swimmer for the Carib Swim Team, she has represented her island numerous times and dreams of becoming an Olympic swimmer. Alongside her passion for the sport, Adaya is equally driven to pursue a career as a veterinarian, hoping to one day return to Sint Maarten to open her own animal clinic. In this candid Q&A with Teen Times, Adaya shares her journey in swimming, the challenges of balancing sports and future aspirations, and her unforgettable experience representing Sint Maarten at the World Championships in Budapest.

1. Who am I?

My name is Adaya Bourne, and I am 17 years old. I am a competitive swimmer for the Carib Swim Team and have been selected multiple times to represent Sint Maarten on the national team. I am a hardworking and determined athlete who strives for big accomplishments. I am also an animal lover, which has inspired me to pursue a career as a veterinarian.

2. What are my goals?

I have many goals in life, but my main dream has always been to become an Olympic swimmer. I fell in love with the water at the age of

three, and by seven, my competitive journey had begun. That's when I decided I wanted to pursue swimming seriously and one day represent Sint Maarten at the Olympics.

My other major goal is to become a veterinarian. From a very young age, I have had a deep love for animals, and that passion remains strong today. I hope to return to Sint Maarten to open my own veterinary clinic and provide medical care to animals in need.

3. Do I see myself becoming a professional swimmer?

Swimming has always been a part of my life, both recreationally and competitively. Seeing how far I've come in my swimming career makes me believe I am on the path to becoming a professional swimmer. Some people tell me I should focus on other things, like getting a traditional job, but I believe in my talent and know I have a lot to prove in the pool. While I am passionate about becoming a vet, I am equally passionate about continuing my swimming career at the highest level.

4. Do I ever feel pressured?

I want to clarify that I have never been pressured by anyone directly. However, pressure is a natural feeling for many athletes. The fear of letting people down—especially when they have high expectations—can be



overwhelming.

Competing in Budapest was an incredible opportunity, and I was grateful for the experience. However, with that opportunity came expectations and outside opinions. Sint Maarten was very supportive of my journey to Budapest, but as an athlete, I felt the weight of representing my island. No athlete wants to disappoint their country or team.

5. How do I stay focused before a competition?

Being nervous before a competition isn't a bad thing—it shows you care. But it's also impor-

tant to know how to calm yourself down when the nerves become overwhelming.

For me, music is the best way to stay focused. Before my races, I always have my headphones on, listening to music or encouraging voice notes from friends and family. Once I feel in the zone, I say a small prayer in my head for reassurance. Of course, races don't always go as planned, but having that moment of reflection helps me feel prepared.

Another way I keep myself calm is by controlling my breathing before stepping behind the diving block. I take a deep breath in and exhale slowly—just like my coach, Eline Broere, always reminds me to do.

6. The months of training leading up to Budapest

Training for Budapest began in early October, with an increase in intensity. We had gym sessions three times a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—starting at 5 a.m. These sessions included weightlifting, core exercises, and strength training. Additionally, we ran laps at Raoul Illidge to build stamina and endurance.

In the afternoons, I had pool training six days a week—Monday through Saturday. My training was split between two coaches: Mr. Dwight Vermeer, who focused on speed and technique, and my club coaches, Eline Broere and Quitin, who worked on endurance. The schedule was intense but well-balanced, ensuring I was fully prepared for Budapest.

7. My experience in Budapest

Finding out I was chosen to represent Sint Maarten at the World Championships was incredible. Learning that the event would

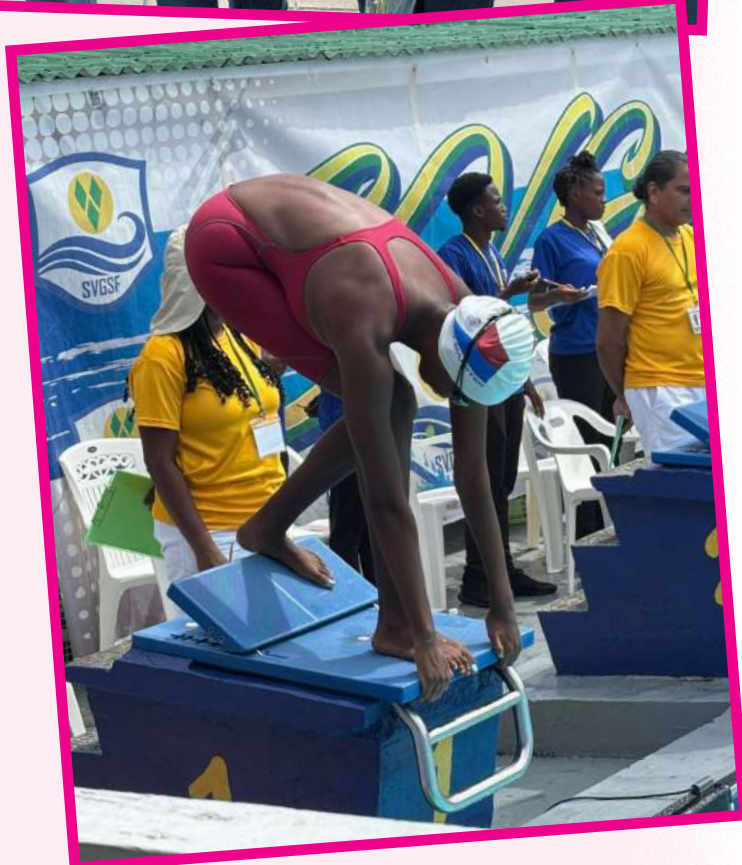


be held in Budapest made it even more exciting.

It was my first time traveling so far from home for a competition—and my first time experiencing such cold weather! The flight was long (over eight hours), but the experience was worth it.

Budapest is a beautiful city filled with historic architecture. The libraries looked like small castles, and gargoyle statues lined the rooftops. Seeing the old buildings and monuments was breathtaking.

The stadium where the championships took place was a dream come true for any swimmer. The competition pool was crystal clear, and the entire dome was lit up with lights and cameras capturing every angle.



One of my most memorable moments was meeting and taking a picture with Gretchen Walsh—a swimmer I had only ever seen online. It was surreal to be surrounded by such high-level athletes. The entire competition exposed me to new experiences, techniques, and training methods. I also got to enjoy some unique and delicious food.

8. What did I learn from your experience in Budapest?

My experience in Budapest was eye-opening. I gained new swimming techniques, learned how to manage period pains during competition, and was exposed to athletes at an even higher level than I had imagined.

The trip made me realize how much room I have to grow and how much harder I need to train. Budapest was just the beginning—I'm motivated to push myself even further.

I also learned that while having confidence is important, never underestimate your opponents.

9. What advice would I give to the Minister of Sports?

I would advise the Minister of Sports to secure more funding for the development of sports and athletes in Sint Maarten. Swimming, in particular, has not received as much attention as other sports on the island.

Recently, with both Nigel and I representing Sint Maarten at the World Championships, more people have started recognizing the talent in our swimming community. Seeing pictures of various athletes from different sports displayed on flagpoles around the island has been an inspiring sight. It instills a sense of pride in us and gives younger athletes something to aspire to.

GETTING TO KNOW COACH BEAUPERTHUY

Coach Omar Beauperthuy has become a transformative figure in Sint Maarten's sports community, shaping young athletes not only into better players but into well-rounded individuals. As the founder of the Performance Sports Academy (PSA), he has dedicated countless hours to creating opportunities for local youth, offering them a pathway to athletic and academic success. Recently named Teen Times' Person of the Year, Coach Beauperthuy's journey from collegiate basketball player to mentor has inspired many.

In this Q&A, he opens up about the inspiration behind PSA, the challenges of coaching, and the lasting impact he hopes to leave on the youth of St. Maarten.

First of all, congrats on being named Teen Times' Person of the Year! How does it feel to be recognized by the youth of St. Maarten?

Honestly, it caught me off guard. For those who know me, they know I'm a relentless worker who prefers to work in silence. However, I'm genuinely grateful for the recognition because I've put in countless hours to make this happen.

What inspired you to start the Performance Sports Academy (PSA), and did you ever imagine it would grow into what it is today?

The inspiration came from seeing what an opportunity did for me—it changed my perspective on life. Basketball created an avenue where I could play a sport I'm passionate about while earning multiple college degrees. The creation of PSA was my way of providing that same opportunity to the youth. If you add value to someone's life, they are less likely to become idle or problematic in society.

I wanted to fill a void I saw on the is-

land regarding proper player development, but I never expected PSA to grow so quickly through word of mouth. At the end of the day, it's a testament to the hard work of the kids and parents who trust the program and see that the structure works.

Standing at 6'8", basketball must have been a huge part of your life. What was your journey like playing at the collegiate level?

My collegiate journey was both interesting and fun. I played at two levels—starting at the NJCAA D1 level with Hillsborough Community College (HCC) and then transferring to Alcorn State University at the NCAA D1 level.

To sum it up, when you're a student-athlete, your schedule is basically predetermined—meaning you don't have a social life. My day would start at 5:45 a.m. and end at 10:30 p.m. The best part was going through that grind with my teammates, developing a brotherhood and bond.

Throughout my career, I played against a lot of tough competition, including players who are still in the NBA and overseas.

PSA's slogan is "Changing Lives by Providing Opportunities." Can you share a specific moment where you felt PSA truly changed someone's life?

There have been many moments, but one that stands out is when a former player randomly reached out to thank me. At first, I was puzzled, but he explained that while in high school on the island, he struggled academically. However, after getting the opportunity to attend high school in the U.S., he excelled both in basketball and in the classroom. He told me he never considered college as an option, but now that he's being recruited, he's ex-



cited about choosing a major.

For me, those are the real wins.

Additionally, I've had several parents reach out to thank me for providing a safe space for their kids to train, keeping them off the streets and out of trouble.

You emphasize not just sports but personal growth. What values do you hope every player walks away with, whether they go pro, play in college, or take a different path in life?

The two main values I want every student-athlete to take away are *work ethic* and *commitment*.

- Work ethic means developing a routine to work toward your goals. The

more you push yourself, the more you grow.

- Commitment is about showing up, even on the bad days. It's what propels you forward.

How do you keep your players motivated, especially when they face challenges or setbacks?

Since I have a strong player-coach relationship with my athletes, they often reach out when something is bothering them. As a coach, I adjust my approach depending on the player—some respond better to a stricter tone, while others need a softer approach.

My goal is to bring out the best in each player. I also make myself available 24/7, which means my phone is basically a call centre for both current and former PSA members seeking advice or guidance.

PSA has produced some amazing talents, including players like Kenverson Malivert and Malachi Martis, who are now playing college basketball. How does it feel to see them succeed?

First off, Malachi is still finishing up his senior year of high school. His resume is already impressive—winning a state championship as a freshman and finishing runner-up as a junior.

Kendo's journey has also been remarkable. In just two years, he led his team in points and rebounds during his senior year and is now adjusting to the college level.

I'm genuinely happy for their success. It's a testament to their work ethic and competitive nature. Success isn't magic—it comes from putting in the work, training 2-3 times a day, and mastering your craft.



Feature



COACH BEAUPERTHUY continued from pg. 8

You also highlight students who are excelling academically. Why is it important to recognize their achievements as much as their athletic success?

Because they're called *student-athletes* for a reason. Academics come first.

For example, Rayshawn Emer-Lake is currently a senior with a 4.0 GPA. Colleges love players who compete both on the court and in the classroom. Many people don't realize that without good grades, you can't train, compete, or keep your scholarship.

What's the biggest challenge you face as a coach and mentor to young athletes?

From a coaching perspective, the biggest challenge is not having a proper facility to train. I'm incredibly grateful to the Catholic School Board and Marie Lawrence School for believing in the vision, but without a dedicated facility, we're constantly playing catch-up compared to American and European systems.

From a mentoring perspective, the challenge is commitment. Some parents want opportunities for their kids but aren't realistic about the effort re-

quired. If an athlete isn't motivated to train on their own, it's already starting on the wrong foot.

Some teens struggle with discipline and focus. What advice do you have for young athletes who feel discouraged?

Discipline and focus are *lifestyle choices*. As an athlete, I had to sacrifice time with family, friends, and social events. You have to step out of your comfort zone to grow.

If you're serious about sports, take care of your body and study the game. A high basketball IQ, combined with elite conditioning, will open doors for you.

If you could tell your teenage self one thing, knowing what you know now, what would it be?

Be *patient*. Instead of getting frustrated when things don't go as planned, analyse the situation and find an alternative solution.

What's next for PSA? Any new programs or goals you're working toward?

From a *social perspective*, we want to provide mentorship for youth who

feel lost and need guidance. A lot of kids turn to negative influences simply because they want to belong somewhere.

From a *sports perspective*, we have several events in the works:

- *American Football Camp* – To introduce another pathway for athletic scholarships.
- *High School Basketball Tournament* – To reignite school spirit.
- *Paradise Showdown* – A local showcase event for young athletes.

I'm also working with the NBB (*Nederlandse Basketball Bond*) to train coaches in St. Maarten, Saba, and Statia, while identifying top talent to

provide feedback to the Netherlands.

How can teens join PSA?

- Simple—reach out on social media:**
- Instagram: @performance_sports_academy_sxm
 - Facebook: Performance Sports Academy-PSA
 - Phone: +1 (721) 526-0753

Finally, what message do you want to leave with the youth of St. Maarten? Don't be afraid to ask for help. We all make mistakes, but rather than bottling up frustration, reach out to someone. A single conversation can change or even save a life.



Feature



More support needed for youth with challenges

BY ALISAH KIRTON

Young people with disabilities in Sint Maarten face significant challenges, including limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and social inclusion. These difficulties stem from the island's lack of resources, infrastructure, and public awareness.

Accessibility remains a major obstacle. There are few accommodations for individuals with disabilities, making daily life difficult. Despite efforts by organizations and the government, many barriers persist, including inadequate special education programmes, inaccessible

infrastructure, employment discrimination, social stigma, limited government funding, healthcare challenges, and a lack of recreational opportunities.

One of the biggest issues is the limited availability of specialized education. Many mainstream schools lack trained staff and resources to support students with disabilities, making it difficult for them to receive the education they deserve. Public buildings, transportation, and recreational spaces often lack accessibility features, preventing full participation in society. Job opportunities for disabled individuals are scarce, and few training

programmes cater to their needs. Social stigma and exclusion further limit their opportunities, while insufficient government support and funding hinder progress. Additionally, healthcare services for people with disabilities remain inadequate, and there are few extracurricular activities designed for their inclusion.

To improve the lives of disabled youth, Sint Maarten must prioritize inclusive education, accessible public infrastructure, job training and employment programs, awareness campaigns to combat stigma, and expanded healthcare services. While programmes like the Second-

ary School for Special Education at SMVTS exist, more inclusive initiatives are needed.

Several organizations and government agencies work to support disabled youth in Sint Maarten. These include the Department of Youth Affairs, the Community Development, Family, and Humanitarian Affairs (CDFHA) office, the Sister Basilia Center (SBC), Special Olympics Sint Maarten, the Sint Maarten Vocational Training School (SMVTS), and the Helping Hands Foundation (HHF). These groups provide resources, programs, counselling, referrals, case management, and empowerment opportunities. They also offer transportation for the elderly and disabled, create inclusive school environments, and organize sports events for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Sint Maarten must take meaningful steps toward inclusivity by expanding educational opportunities, improving infrastructure, developing employment programs, reducing stigma, and enhancing healthcare services. Addressing these issues will create a more accessible and welcoming society for all young people.



IMPACT OF MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION ON SINT MAARTEN'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

BY ENHUA WU

Imagine seeing cannabis cafés next to beach bars in Sint Maarten. Would it enhance Sint Maarten's international appeal or create new problems? Many Caribbean countries are exploring the idea of legalizing marijuana and its effects on tourism, making it a hot topic. Sint Maarten relies heavily on tourism as its main industry—could legal cannabis attract more visitors and revenue, or would it damage the country's reputation? The potential impacts of marijuana legalization on Sint Maarten's tourism industry are both positive and negative.

Prime Minister Dr. Luc Mercelina recently stated that Sint Maarten is not ready for legal cannabis due to concerns regarding mental health services and law enforcement. As a result, recreational marijuana use remains illegal as of 2025. However, discussions continue about whether Sint Maarten should follow the steps of other Caribbean nations that have moved toward legalization. *Cannabis tourism*, which refers to traveling for leisure with the intent to use marijuana legally, is booming in places like Jamaica. Additionally, Amsterdam is famous for its cannabis cafés. If marijuana were legalized, could Sint Maarten follow this trend?

Potential Benefits

Attracting More Tourists

People from countries where cannabis is legal—such as the U.S., Canada, and parts of Europe—could be

drawn to St. Maarten. Following decriminalization, Jamaica saw a surge in tourism as visitors flocked to cannabis plantations and dispensaries. If Sint Maarten were to follow suit, local businesses might experience similar growth.

Creating Job Opportunities

A regulated cannabis industry could generate new jobs in dispensaries, cannabis-friendly resorts, wellness spas, and agriculture. Young people could find employment as tour guides, budtenders (dispensary employees), or in product development, such as creating cannabis-infused food and cosmetics. This would offer career paths beyond traditional tourism jobs.

Positioning St. Maarten as a Trendsetter

Legalizing marijuana before neighbouring islands like Anguilla, Antigua, or the Dominican Republic could give St. Maarten a competitive edge in the regional cannabis market.

Potential Drawbacks

Damage to the country's Reputation

Sint Maarten is well-known for its duty-free shopping, luxury resorts, and pristine beaches. Some worry that being labelled a “weed island” could deter high-spending travellers and families looking for a more upscale experience. In fact, Amsterdam is currently restricting cannabis tourism due to its negative impact on the city's reputation.



Increased Crime and Black Market Sales

Even with legalization, illegal marijuana sales might persist, creating enforcement challenges. In Jamaica, legal dispensaries struggle to compete with unlicensed sellers, proving that a black market can still thrive despite legalization.

Stricter Regulations from Cruise Lines & Airlines

Airlines and cruise lines have strict anti-drug policies. If Sint Maarten legalizes marijuana, some companies might limit their services to the island to avoid legal complications. This could negatively impact the economy. For example, Bermuda attempted to legalize marijuana but was blocked by the British government, partly due to concerns about restrictions on international travel.

Minimizing Negative Effects

To reduce risks while maximizing benefits, Sint Maarten could implement the following measures:

- Licensed dispensaries only (strictly prohibit street sales)
- Age restrictions (18+ or 21+ to purchase)
- Strict rules on public use (no smoking on beaches or in public areas)
- Focus on wellness tourism (cannabis-infused spa treatments, edibles, and medical use)
- Education on responsible consumption

Conclusion

Legalizing marijuana could boost the economy and create jobs, but it also comes with challenges, including crime, reputational concerns, and possible travel restrictions. If Sint Maarten considers legalization, it must take a responsible approach—minimizing risks while capitalizing on potential benefits. The decision requires careful planning to ensure that the island's tourism industry thrives without unintended negative consequences.

Feature

THE OPINIONS OF STUDENTS ABROAD ON THE LEGALISATION OF WEED IN SINT MAARTEN

BY ARTI BULLAND

Around the world, more countries are debating cannabis legalisation, and Sint Maarten is no exception. With discussions unfolding in the country about whether weed should be legal, we sought the opinions of young people, particularly Sint Maarten students, studying abroad. They shared their views on legalisation, its potential economic impact, and its effects on the country's youth. Here's what they had to say.

Saheli Kirpalani

The legalisation of weed is a complex issue. On one hand, it could benefit the island's economy, but on the other, its abuse—especially by young people—could have serious consequences. If teenagers become accustomed to legal weed, addiction risks may rise, affecting their well-being, relationships, and academic performance. Without proper education and regulation, legalisation could do more harm than good. It's crucial to consider the long-term effects and prioritize the health and future of Sint Maarten's youth.

Chirag Ramchandani

The legalisation of weed in Sint Maarten presents both advantages and drawbacks. The government's recent Act highlights potential economic benefits and scientific uses of cannabis but also acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding its full impact on the island.

A key debate concerns whether Sint Maarten could follow Amsterdam's model, using cannabis as a tourism booster. Given Sint Maarten's historical ties to the Netherlands, one might ask: Could it thrive as the "Amsterdam of the Caribbean," or would legalisation lead to social decline? While tourism could benefit, health concerns, addiction risks, and law enforcement challenges must be considered—especially in a small island with limited healthcare facilities.



Another major concern is regulation. If legalisation proceeds, will Sint Maarten be capable of enforcing laws effectively? With limited resources, is the island ready to follow the Netherlands' approach? Additionally, since Sint Maarten shares a border with the French side, where cannabis remains illegal, legalisation could strain cross-border relations.

Ultimately, I believe Sint Maarten is unprepared for legalisation. Without strong healthcare and law enforcement systems in place, widespread addiction and social consequences could quickly spiral out of control.

Anonymous

The biggest concern about legalizing weed in Sint Maarten is its impact on youth. Readily available cannabis could expose teenagers to a substance they may not be equipped to handle responsibly. While there are potential benefits, these can only be realized if people are properly educated on responsible use. Right now, I



don't think the youth of Sint Maarten are knowledgeable enough for legalisation to become part of everyday life.

Tourism is vital to our economy, but there are other ways to boost the industry without risking the future of our island.

Final Thoughts

The perspectives of Sint Maarten students abroad highlight a range of opinions. While some see legalisation as an economic opportunity, particularly for tourism, others fear its social and health consequences—especially for youth. The island's ability to regulate and enforce cannabis laws effectively remains a major concern, as weak healthcare and law enforcement systems may struggle to manage po-

tential risks.

Additionally, cross-border tensions with the French side and the risk of rising addiction rates must be carefully considered. Sint Maarten may not yet be fully prepared for this step. Any decision should be made with thorough research, education, and long-term planning to protect both the island's people and its future.



A TEACHER'S THOUGHTS ON CANNABIS AND LEGALISATION

BY DISHITA BABANI

The potential legalisation of marijuana is a topic that raises important questions for teachers, parents, students, and schools. While some see legalisation as an economic opportunity, others worry about its impact on youth and education. If marijuana were to become legal, how would schools respond? Would students' attitudes toward drug use change? What role would educators play in guiding them?

To explore these questions, an interview was conducted with a teacher to hear their thoughts on how marijuana legalisation could affect schools, students, and educational policies.

What are your thoughts on the potential legalisation of marijuana?

I believe marijuana can be beneficial for medical purposes when prescribed by a doctor. Many people rely on it for pain relief and other health conditions. However, like any substance, it has both positive and negative effects.

One major benefit of legalisation is the ability to implement public health campaigns that promote responsible use and educate people about potential risks and long-term effects. Legalisation also has significant economic and legal advantages. It can create jobs and research opportunities in fields such as agriculture, public health (law and policy), and medical research.

However, legalisation also comes with challenges. A large portion of cannabis is currently supplied through illegal dealers, who often target younger users. Legalisation



could help reduce reliance on the black market, making marijuana use significantly safer. That being said, cannabis use at a young age can negatively impact brain development.

Ultimately, whether someone should use marijuana depends on their individual circumstances and needs. While it can provide medical benefits and recreational enjoyment, it also poses risks if used irresponsibly or at a young age. Education on safe use, health risks, and addiction potential is crucial. Like alcohol, cannabis requires informed decision-making and moderation.

Are you concerned that legalisation would lead to increased consumption? Why or why not?

If marijuana is legalised, there should be a legal age restriction in place to prevent minors from accessing it. If a minor is caught in possession of

or under the influence of cannabis, parents should be held accountable through fines. This could help reduce underage use and encourage parental supervision.

At the same time, legalisation could allow for better public education, ensuring that young people understand the risks rather than being drawn to marijuana out of rebellion. Instead of relying on fear-based messaging, schools and communities could focus on providing accurate information to promote responsible decision-making.

What are your concerns if marijuana is legalised?

My main concern is the potential for personal abuse, where individuals may become dependent on cannabis and struggle to function without it. Misuse can lead to impaired judgment, affecting tasks such as driving, operating machinery, and workplace

performance.

While legalisation does not necessarily mean lower usage rates, it does ensure safer access, reduces reliance on illegal dealers, prevents unnecessary criminalization, and allows for better regulation and education. Ensuring that legalisation is accompanied by strong policies on safety, regulation, and public awareness will be essential in addressing these concerns.

How would schools react?

If marijuana is legalised, schools would need to adapt their policies while still prioritizing student well-being and safety. In addition to education, schools must establish clear rules regarding possession and use. Just like alcohol, marijuana use would likely remain prohibited on school grounds.

However, legalisation could change how schools handle disciplinary actions. Rather than relying on strict punishments, schools could focus on harm-reduction strategies, such as counselling or intervention programs for students who may be misusing cannabis.

Another key effect of legalisation is the potential reduction of stigma, allowing students to have open, judgment-free conversations about marijuana use with peers, teachers, and parents. Schools can collaborate with parents and the community to reinforce education at home, ensuring that students understand legal age restrictions and the importance of responsible decision-making.

Ultimately, the goal of schools should be to educate rather than punish, helping students navigate the realities of legalisation with accurate information, responsible guidance, and access to support if needed.



LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

BY SUHANI NATHUMAL

Since discussions about the legalization of marijuana became public, the topic has sparked ongoing debate. While some view it as a positive step toward regulation, others strongly oppose it, worrying about societal and health impacts—especially on the youth of Sint Maarten. Advocates highlight potential benefits such as economic growth and reduced crime, while critics worry about increased accessibility and long-term consequences.

To gain insight from a parental perspective—because, after all, parents know best—I spoke with a local parent who shared her thoughts on legalization and its potential effects on youth, society, and family life.

Mixed Feelings on Legalization

When asked about the potential legalization of marijuana in Sint Maarten, the parent expressed mixed emotions. “While I understand the potential economic benefits of regulation and taxation, I worry about how it could impact young people and public health. The government would need strict policies in place to prevent misuse.”

Regarding whether marijuana should be legalized for medical or recreational use, she stated, “I believe marijuana should be legalized for medical use because of its benefits in treating pain, seizures, and other conditions. Recreational use is more complicated, as it could lead to a higher rate of dependency and social consequences, which I don’t think Sint Maarten is prepared for.”

Concerns for Youth and Society

As a parent, one of the biggest concerns is the potential impact on teenagers. “Yes, I am very concerned that legalization could make



marijuana more accessible to teenagers. Even with age restrictions, some minors will still find ways to obtain it, just like alcohol or tobacco.”

This parent has had multiple conversations with her child about marijuana use and its adverse effects. “I told them that while there may be benefits, it is still a drug that affects the brain, especially for young users. I’ve emphasized the importance of making informed choices and being cautious about peer pressure. However, it is ultimately their decision, which worries me.”

When asked if legalization would make it harder or easier for parents to educate their children about drug use, the parent saw both sides. “Legalization might make it easier by removing the ‘forbidden’ appeal and allowing for open discussions. However, it could also make it harder if society starts treating marijuana too casually, downplaying the risks.”

She strongly supports schools playing a role in marijuana education. “Absolutely. Schools should provide factual education about marijuana use, its effects, and the consequences of

substance abuse. Additionally, they should enforce strict rules and ensure that students are not using drugs on school premises.”

Regarding whether she would be comfortable with her child using marijuana once of legal age, the parent remained hesitant. “Even if it’s legal, I would not be completely okay with my child using marijuana. I would encourage them to wait until they are fully mature and understand the effects it can have on their health and decision-making.”

Another concern is the potential influence of parental marijuana use on children’s perceptions. “Yes, if parents use marijuana openly, it normalizes the behavior. Children may see it as harmless or socially acceptable, which could increase their likelihood of trying it.”

Health and Safety Risks

Health concerns remain a significant factor in the parent’s stance. “Yes, I’m very concerned. Research shows that marijuana can impact memory, focus, and brain development in young people. There are also risks of addiction, impaired judgment, and lung damage if it’s smoked.”

When asked whether marijuana is a gateway drug, she responded, “While not everyone who uses marijuana moves on to harder drugs, I do believe there is a risk for some people. It depends on the individual, their environment, and how frequently they use it.”

She also believes strict regulations would be necessary if marijuana were legalized. “There should be strict age limits, regulations on advertising, and limits on THC levels to prevent overly potent products from becoming widely available. There should also be education campaigns to inform young people of the risks.”

Legal and Economic Considerations

On whether legalization could reduce crime, the parent sees both advantages and disadvantages. “Legalization might reduce some drug-related

crime, but it could also create new issues, such as increased impaired driving or illegal sales outside the legal market. It depends on how well the government regulates it.”

Regarding taxation, she supports the idea. “Yes, if marijuana is legalized, the government should control and tax it like alcohol and tobacco. The revenue could be used for education, healthcare, and addiction treatment programs.”

Cultural and Personal Perspective

When asked about the cultural stereotype of marijuana in Sint Maarten, the parent agreed that stigma still exists. “Yes, I think there is still a stigma around marijuana use, especially among older generations. Many people associate it with laziness, crime, or addiction, even if that’s not always the case. Overall, I think being associated with marijuana use may come at the risk of ruining your reputation.”

Legalization could also lead to changes in parenting strategies. “Yes, parenting approaches would need to shift, requiring me to educate my child about responsible decision-making and the potential consequences of marijuana use, even if it is legal. Open conversations would be essential. This may be a challenge for ‘older generation’ households, leading to children sneaking around and using drugs.”

Rising Youth Violence

The parent also expressed concern about the rising number of fights among young people in Sint Maarten. “We’ve seen an increase in violence among teenagers, and I worry that legalizing marijuana could make this worse. If the government is trying to reduce violence while at the same time promoting a drug that has been linked to aggression and impaired judgment, it feels contradictory. Instead, the focus should be on addressing the root causes of violence and providing better education, counseling, and support systems for our youth.”

Conclusion

The possible legalization of marijuana in Sint Maarten is undoubtedly a complex issue. The concerned parent highlighted key factors the government should consider, such as public health, youth education, and strong regulations. She also emphasized the importance of public discussions, expert advice, and awareness campaigns before making any decisions.

If the government moves forward with legalization, it must prioritize a balanced approach that includes strict regulation, comprehensive education, and effective enforcement.



The MUN Experience

BY SANYA JANDIAL

Model United Nations (MUN) is more than just an extracurricular activity – it’s where students roleplay as world leaders, represent different countries, and tackle global issues. Beyond the debates and resolutions, MUN helps develop valuable academic, social, and professional skills for students. For the past nine years, Learning Unlimited Preparatory School has been attending these conferences. Harvard MUN (HMUN) used to be the top choice, but this year, the school wanted to explore new opportunities by participating in Boston MUN (BOSMUN). One student was eager to share his experience!

Can you briefly introduce yourself?

My name is Param Jessani. I am a senior at Learning Unlimited and turned 17 in April last year. During this Model UN conference, I represented Belarus in the United Nations Development Committee.

How long have you been participating in MUN, and what first inspired you to join?

I have been participating in Model United Nations for three years and am currently the club president. Part of why I first joined was the chance to fly abroad without my parents, just with my friends; the chance to visit Boston made joining very appealing. However, the fact that at MUN you get to meet tonnes of people from all over the world and debate simultaneously, which I enjoy, played just as much of a role in making me join.

As you’ve participated in both HMUN and BOSMUN, how would you compare these two?

I did Harvard MUN for my first two years, and for the first time in a long

while, we switched to Boston MUN, where I did my third MUN conference. While both are top #5 MUN conferences, there are some major differences between the two. The size of BOSMUN is 2,483 delegates, while HMUN can have up to 4,000, which translates to the committees. HMUN tends to have more double delegations, where two people represent the same country. In contrast, BOSMUN generally has a single delegation, and as such, committees at HMUN tend to be much bigger and held in massive halls, whereas BOSMUN has normal-sized rooms. Additionally, the people you meet are different, both in terms of diversity and seriousness. Both conferences are filled with intelligent people; however, at HMUN, people tend to be very serious, only focused on the conference. At BOSMUN, while the people were still focused on the conference, they had a bit more to them—they had a life outside of the conference. BOSMUN and HMUN have international delegates, but they comprise a smaller percentage of BOSMUN’s population. In contrast, in HMUN, most people seemed to be international, with many from the Middle East and South America.

What are some key lessons or skills you’ve gained from your MUN experience?

MUN gives you some amazing and unique experiences. From meeting people from all over the world—at times, we had groups of 10+ people, with everyone from a different country—to traveling on your own and being in charge of things like managing your money, getting food, and doing activities, you really learn a lot. I would say there are two main skills



you pick up: one is being social and communicating with those around you. You have to make agreements and work together during these meetings, which forces you to develop social skills. Even if you don’t participate as much, you are in a room for three hours multiple times, so you have no choice but to make friends. Second, I would say you learn to manage yourself and your time. While traveling, you are in charge of your documents and ensuring you have everything you need. While in Boston, it is up to you to make it to your meetings and get breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There is no one to make sure you get up on time and are ready for your meeting, and if there are any activities you want to do, it’s up to you to plan out. You are usually on a fixed budget, so you must also keep your spending in check. It can be especially chaotic if it is your first time, but by the end, it will leave you better off.

If you were encouraging someone

to try MUN for the first time, what would you say to convince them?

MUN can seem intimidating at first, but once you’re actually in it, you realize it’s not just about debating—it’s about the experience as a whole. You get to meet people from all over the world, travel to new places, and develop skills without even realizing it. Even if you’re not the most confident speaker, MUN forces you to step out of your comfort zone in the best way possible. You’ll learn to communicate, negotiate, and manage yourself in a way that no other school activity really teaches. Plus, the memories you make, whether it’s getting lost in a new city, rushing to your meetings, or staying up late with your friends, both old and new, it really is a crazy experience. It’s an opportunity you won’t regret taking.

Model United Nations helps students build important skills that stick with them for life.





KENDRICK'S MESSAGING

BY SURAJ VASWANI

On February 9, 2025, Kendrick Lamar cemented his place in history as the first solo hip-hop artist to headline the Super Bowl halftime show. Performing at Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, Lamar delivered a powerful and culturally significant show in front of a record-breaking audience of over 133 million worldwide. It wasn't just a celebration of music—it was a statement about culture and identity.

Lamar's setlist featured a mix of his biggest hits and songs from his latest album, including *HUMBLE.*, *DNA.*, and the widely discussed *Not Like Us*—a track at the center of his highly publicized feud with Drake. The decision to include *Not Like Us* was significant. The song, for which he won five Grammys, had evolved beyond a diss track into an anthem of artistic integrity.

The performance was further elevated by a special guest appearance from SZA, who brought incredible energy to the show. She joined

Lamar for a short but impactful performance of *All the Stars* and *Luther*, which became a highlight of the night, showcasing the undeniable chemistry between the two artists.

Adding another layer of depth, Samuel L. Jackson appeared as Uncle Sam—a common personification of the United States—serving as the emcee. His humorous yet biting commentary, particularly his remarks about the dancers being “too loud, too reckless, too ghetto,” was likely a critique of racial inequality deeply embedded in American culture. This aligned seamlessly with Kendrick's tradition of using his platform to address social issues.

Visually and symbolically, Kendrick's performance carried profound meaning. The stage design featured an enormous gamepad, representing *The Great American Game*—a metaphorical critique of the game-like nature of the American Dream. The red, white, and blue dancers further emphasized the performance's patriotic and satirical undertones.

At one point during his performance, Kendrick declared, “*Forty acres and a mule—this is bigger than the music.*” This referenced the unfulfilled promise made to formerly enslaved people after the Civil War, which was intended to provide them with land and resources for economic self-sufficiency but was ultimately reversed by President Andrew Johnson. By invoking this historical injustice, Lamar once again shined a light on the ongoing struggle for racial equality.

However, the show was not without controversy. Some viewers found it overly political or difficult to enjoy. Regardless of the divided reception, Kendrick Lamar's Super Bowl halftime performance was more than just a concert—it was a cultural statement. It marked a milestone in hip-hop history, embodying the genre's original purpose: self-expression. His performance will likely be remembered as a defining moment that pushed the boundaries of what is possible on one of the world's biggest stages.