

NFL ANONYMOUS

For over 35 years I was as loyal and dedicated a Browns fan as anyone. My loyalties were formed growing up in Columbus at a time when Ohio State was on television only twice a year by NCAA rule, the Bengals didn't exist, and the Steelers weren't very good. We were outside the infamous 50 mile blackout zone so we got the Browns 14 times a year and I made an effort to see every game. The Browns were the dream football product.

But chinks developed in the armor. In 1982 after 2 games were played the next 5 games were canceled due to a strike. A team with a 4-5 record made the playoffs. We were asked nonetheless to consider 1982 a "real" season. In 1987 another strike made a charade of the NFL using replacement players for much of the year.

But the unforgiveable happened when the Browns moved to Baltimore in 1996 and the Browns were out of the league for 3 years. At that point I gave up the NFL cold-turkey. I have never come back and I am amazed that almost everyone else has.

A marriage is for better or worse – until the "worse" is unforgiveable at which point divorce is the only rational answer. But NFL fans appear to elastically endure all indignity experiencing what a friend of mine aptly calls "battered fan syndrome."

NFL fans will endure any indignity including:

1. Outrageous ticket prices that require purchasing season tickets that include preseason "games" (scrimmages where neither team is trying their best to win).
2. Game times dictated by television rather than fairness to fans including Monday night (weeknight) football games that end well after midnight and playoff games at night in December or January in places like Chicago or Green Bay.
3. Taunting, outrageous taunting, some of it by men in their 30s, that high schools wouldn't tolerate.
4. The blurring of sport and entertainment as the networks shamelessly whip up controversies, glorify people like "T.O." and "Ocho Cinco" and cover every ridiculous celebration from start to insufferable finish, not to mention mascots, gimmicks, and 40 member cheerleader squads.

So what is the solution? For me it was simple but painful. Call it Sitting at Home Watching NFL Anonymous. I refuse to watch NFL football. Since the Browns left Cleveland I have gone from 42 hours a year or more to 0 of watching the NFL. I haven't seen a Budweiser advertisement in 3 years. It's sad and it hurts, but you know the fall is beautiful in Ohio and I've raked a lot of leaves and done a lot of fun things with family since 1996 that I would not have done if I had been at home watching the NFL games.

The secret to my success of breaking free from the addiction of NFL football is the pigskin version of methadone – college football. The college game is loaded with its' own issues which for me used to make it subordinate to the NFL- the hypocrisy of amateurism, the hypocrisy of “student athletes” , the gross disparity between the “haves” and the “have nots” come immediately to mind, but at the end of the analysis when Ohio State says it's going to play 12 games, it plays 12 games, it plays its best players, and it is never, ever going to move out of Columbus.

There is life after the NFL for former players and there is life after watching the NFL for former fans. Join me.

Darrell L. Heckman
26 Camelot Drive
Urbana, Ohio
(937) 653-7186