

Dan Naumovich: TV fumbles football coverage

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I like football. When executed well, football is the triumphant culmination of hard work, honed athleticism and cunning strategy. It's both physical and cerebral, barbarous and graceful. And it's becoming almost impossible to watch.

It's not the sport that's the problem; it's the production. In short, TV is ruining football.

The packaging of the sport into a vehicle for generating revenues and reaching key demographics has turned the once-mighty gridiron into a three-ring circus. It starts during the pre-game show, when a pack of hosts, experts and ex-jocks pile out of the proverbial tiny car and start clowning around.

It's not that I don't appreciate a little analysis or prognostication; it's just that such content has become overwhelmed by wise-cracking, catch-phrasing and overall joshing around. This forced joviality and "Come on, man" histrionics are a bit much for a Sunday. People need time for the morning's solemnity to lift before exposing them to Terry Bradshaw.

Recently, while giving their picks for the upcoming game, every member of one network's team, grown men all, referred to the Giants from New York as the G-men. I'm sure that term was suggested to them by some media consultant as a way to appeal to viewers with Maxim subscriptions. I'm also sure that John Facenda — the voice of God from those old, slow-motion NFL films — never referred to Lombardi's autumn warriors as the Pack-men.

I understand that I'm not in the demographic that the NFL and its networks are courting ... in that I've been domesticated.

I like watching the NFL, but I haven't adopted its brand into my personal lifestyle. Monday nights don't find me in a Salvation Army-furnished garage drinking beers and wearing league-authorized apparel. As for all my rowdy friends, they pretty much calmed down after high school.

My game-watching is often regulated to our utility room, home of the smallest TV in the house, where I'm expected to quell any primal stirrings that the sport may arouse by tending to the endless cycle of laundry. Often my 8-year-old son will join me, and when he does, I keep the remote at the ready.

While watching football remains a bonding experience for dads and their lads, it does require a

quick clicker finger to skip past the naughty parts. I'm not referring to the on-field violence, which is largely concealed beneath heavy armor and a spirit of play, but the R-rated content that airs during breaks.

The networks like to promote their prime-time fare to the NFL audience. Their programming seems to have gotten quite a bit spicier over the years, if these clips are any indication. In my day, Joanie may have loved Chachi, but unlike current TV characters, she did so modestly and in compliance with prevailing standards of decency.

Then, of course, there are those pharmaceutical ads of a certain nature (hint: they're intended more for Mr. and Mrs. C. than Joanie and Chachi). Clearly, I'm not the only dad who sits uneasy in fear that one of their kids will ask what exactly is going on in these commercials. Quite frankly, I'm not entirely sure myself.

While some feel beer commercials are detrimental in that they encourage underage drinking, I think most have the opposite effect. Watching delusional men who think that coaches are communicating directly with them during press conferences will likely scare kids straight about the dangers of overindulging in Coors Light.

Of course, many of the aforementioned ills can be avoided through deft use of the DVR. Still, it would be nice, since football is truly a culturally significant slice of Americana, if it could be presented to us with a little more dignity.

Chad Ochocinco deserves better.

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