Here is one time being a Time Warner customer is a benefit. No access to the NFL Network.

Because of an on-going pissing match with the NFL over the value of its in-house network, Time Warner cable customers have been spared any temptation to lose valuable minutes and hours that they'll never get back by watching the NFL Network instead of doing almost anything else.

The problem isn't the programming, per se. Rather the problem stems from the fact that the network's very existence encourages the NFL to exploit any and every aspect of its operations. Meanwhile, the NFL's other partners, like ESPN, feel the heat that an in-house network with a built-in advantage creates and respond accordingly. The outcome is a nearly incoherent yet endless bombardment of programming that provides plenty of analysis with little if any actual information.

Between ESPN and the NFL Network, more hours have been devoted to answering the question about Tim Tebow's future than had been given to understanding the Apollo Moon Walk, the Nixon/Watergate scandal and the recent health care reform debate, combined.

Maybe that's an exaggeration, but far less of one than half of those made by a growing phalanx of so-called analysts whose only qualification seems to have been their singular ability to retire

from the NFL before suffering one too many concussions. As for Mel Kiper, Jr., about the only thing worth admiring is his singular ability to turn nerdism and bad hair into a full time, fairly lucrative vocation.

What these two networks, as well as their wannabe little brothers at networks like Sports Time Ohio, really have done is find a way to monetize conversations previously reserved for the local bars. And yet it's almost the least offensive thing they do.

The most offensive would be, of course, the so-called NFL schedule show on ESPN Tuesday night. If it didn't exist you'd think I was making it up. The NFL is too stately of an operation to merely release its schedule anymore like every other professional sports league. It needs a grand entrance complete with even more meaningless analysis.

Virtually any conclusion one might want to reach about their team's schedule can't be gleaned in late April. It is often less important who a team plays or where than it is when and when isn't just a function of the time of year. Some teams are quick starters others take time to find their stride.

A few seasons ago the Cleveland Browns opened against the Dallas Cowboys. The Cowboys came out of training camp clicking and the Browns were absolutely no match for them. Yet several weeks later those same Cowboys were mostly a mess and much less formidable.

Then there's always the difficulty in predicting the difficulty of next year's schedule based on the previous season's records of the teams you'll be playing. Sure, you can pretty much conclude that the Browns will win maybe two of their 6 division games but that's just an annoying constant. But will Kansas City again be the dregs of the league given the significant upgrades they've made in their personnel and coaching staff? Will New Orleans again play like they own the league?

Each season tends to take on its own personality and it often is far different from that of the previous season. All of this combines to tell me that irrespective of how much the NFL likes to exploit its product, the average fan would know just as much now if the league had simply released the schedule to the media like it used to do.

Falling somewhere between draft previews and schedule releases on the distraction schedule is the draft itself. In true NFL fashion, an event that was already more boring than a Browns preseason game against the Lions has been made even more so by dragging it out over three days instead of two.

You think there is dead time in the average hour of American Idol? Wait until the NFL draft is conducted over three days starting on Thursday. The first round, with the 15 minutes allotted to each team to make a decision they've been pondering for months, lasts twice as long as The English Patient, heretofore the benchmark of tedium.

It starts at 7:30 p.m. which means that somewhere around midnight the last of the first round will finish up. For those precious few that haven't fallen asleep yet, both ESPN and the NFL Network promise to increase the dosage on their broadcast sleeping pills by spending all remaining moments until Friday evening analyzing the "winners" and "losers" of that first round, as if that were even possible.

Perhaps to garner more attention for the even less scintillating second and third rounds, ESPN is broadcasting them on Friday night. If you think watching your team draft a non-descript offensive tackle in the first round fails to quicken the pulse wait until your team spends the next two rounds finding hidden gems like Mohamad Massaquoi and Chaun Thompson.

Then, of course, its on to Saturday's run-up to the real point of it all, finding Mr. Irrelevant a.k.a. the last player drafted. With just 7 rounds, Mr. Irrelevant isn't nearly as Irrelevant as he used to be, yet his chances of sticking in the NFL are only slightly better than Jerry Rice's chances of actually becoming a competitive professional golfer or, stated differently, exactly the same as Michael Jordan's chances were of becoming a competitive professional baseball player.

What the NFL seems to have absolutely no concern over is the saturation of their product. There can never be too much of the NFL, according to commission Roger Goodell. That's why we get made-for-TV events like the announcement of the schedule, not to mention "reality" shows like Hard Knocks on HBO, a really bizarre concept when you consider that professional sports has always been the ultimate reality show.

I'd like to think we've reached the outer limits of the NFL's hubris and the public's ability to fund it, but I know better. What I don't know is where the NFL takes this next.

If the NFL wanted to have a show that went in depth on the finances of each team, that might be something actually worth watching. If the NFL could partner with MSNBC on weekends and follow the legal exploits of dirt bags like Ben Roethlisberger as they try to wriggle out of legal jams by throwing money at desperate college girls, that might be worth watching as well. Heck, it would be great programming if they filmed Goodell's meetings with troubled players like Roethlisberger or Santonio Holmes.

I suspect, though, that none of that is forthcoming. Instead the logical extension of the NFL's march toward world domination is a longer season featuring more teams and a Super Bowl that's played at the end of March. That way the off-season would really be about 6-weeks long.

In a way, that would be a welcome change. Anything to limit further the broadcast time afforded to Mel Kiper, Jr. can only be a positive.