Every basketball season all Mid-American Conference basketball teams take a brief break from their conference season to either host or travel to a team from a similar conference for a one-game showdown.

Why?

In this writer's opinion ESPN's annual BracketBuster schedule, a slate of games that pits so-called mid-major teams against other so-called mid-major teams to give them a chance to bolster their out-of-conference resume, is nothing but a colossal waste of time, energy and money. A more pointless annual event, other than annual property tax assessments, is hard to find.

What was the point of this season's ESPN BracketBuster schedule of games? Well, for one it took teams participating in a heated race for the East and West Division crowns, and forced them to play a game with virtually no point. It took players geared up for key late-season showdowns against conference rivals and created a situation where they had to take on an opponent that, in the long run, mattered not one bit in terms of putting their teams into position to advance to the NCAA Tournament.

As a mid-major, what is usually the only path to the "Big Dance?" Easy answer, win you conference tournament and claim the automatic bid that comes with the tournament championship trophy. Other than that unless you have a few huge wins against non-conference opponents in the Top 25, chances are you are either going to the NIT of getting ready for summer.

How can a team bolster its tournament resume if it is playing a similar opponent from a conference that is in the same situation as the MAC…being one of what the pundits (and, unfortunately the NCAA Selection Committee) regard as “one-bid” conferences? How will Western Michigan’s home win over Illinois State make one bit of difference? Or Akron’s win over Creighton at Rhodes Arena?

If you want to make the slate of games truly “Bracket Busters” you have to do a lot better than that. A schedule of teams like Kent, Miami, Buffalo and other strong MAC teams against bottom dwellers in the Top 25, teams like No. 16 Louisville, No. 20 Missouri, No. 23 St. John’s or No. 25 Xavier. There are also teams that have received votes in the polls, but are not in the Top 25 that could play a part in a true BracketBuster schedule. Put together meaningful games and make the stronger teams travel. Make Alabama come to Kent and win. Send Florida State to Millett Hall, or West Virginia to the JAR.

If you want teams to prove their tournament worthiness, send the traditionally bigger schools from the top conferences to play these so-called “mid-majors” on their turf, then see how things shake out.

Ohio University at Winthrop, who cares? UNLV at Ohio inside a rocking Convocation Center, that I would like to see.

Meanwhile, in ESPN’s current BracketBuster format, instead of teams actually being able to help themselves they actually could end up harming their chances. Too much travel this late in the season is a burden, especially if a team is in the hunt for a division title and has a string of important games coming up.

For instance, Kent State played Miami in Oxford last Wednesday, travelled to Philadelphia to lose to Drexel in a game that meant nothing and now must hit the road again to take on Western Michigan in Kalamazoo tonight in a very big game for both teams. And after that, this Thursday, the Golden Flashes come home to host Buffalo in another critical game. Do you think the trip to Philly was beneficial for Kent’s division championship hopes?

Kent is battling with Miami atop the MAC East, sitting a half-game in back of the RedHawks. Miami also had to hit the road for its BracketBuster game. The RedHawks, after hosting Kent

Wednesday, headed to Virginia to play James Madison. They now must get ready for a trip to Akron Wednesday before coming home to host Bowling Green Saturday, then taking off for Buffalo next Wednesday. I am sure Miami coach Charlie Coles could have done without the trip to Virginia for a game that did not help his team in the conference standings, nor helped the RedHawks on a national scope.

Then there is Ohio. They had to play at Buffalo last Tuesday and were able to get a huge road win. Now, instead of taking that momentum and riding it into another conference game, the Bobcats instead had to travel to South Carolina to play Winthrop. This with games against Bowling Green (Wednesday at home), Kent (Saturday on the road) and Akron (next Tuesday at home) looming on the horizon.

In the West, Western Michigan just might win the division title because of BracketBuster games. While the Broncos, who lead the West with a 7-4 conference record, were able to stay at home, after a trip to Northern Illinois last Tuesday, to host Illinois State on Saturday, Ball State (7-5 in the MAC) had to head to Wofford in South Carolina. Now the Cardinals host Eastern Michigan Wednesday before hitting the road for a pair of games, Central Michigan Saturday and Western Michigan Wednesday. WMU will play three of its next four at home, including the showdown with Ball State.

I would imagine the Cardinals would rather have stayed home as opposed to heading to South Carolina for a contest against lightly-regarded Wofford. And, with the schedule as it is, is in a worse situation than the team it is chasing in the standings.

I understand the concept behind ESPN's BracketBuster games. However, the program, in its ninth year, leaves a lot to be desired in terms of execution. When the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee is sitting down to hand out the at-large bids you can rest assured its members give the results of these BracketBuster games very little weight or concern. Want to see the brackets actually get busted? Take some of these teams from the so-called "power conferences" and make them prove themselves against the best of the mid-majors. Otherwise, let these teams concentrate on their regular-season championships and get ready for their one real chance to make it to the NCAA Tourney…their conference championship tournaments.