

TOP STORIES IN Life & Style



China's Private Party

1 of 10



Lookin at Lucky Wins Preakness

2 of 10



A Lament for the Class of 2010

3 of 10

SPORTS | JANUARY 15, 2010

11 Minutes of Action

Article

Video

Comments (68)

MORE IN SPORTS MAIN »

Email Print Save This Like 6,095 + More Text

By DAVID BIDERMAN

Football fans everywhere are preparing to settle in for the NFL's biggest and most electric weekend of the season—a four-game playoff marathon that will swallow up at least 12 hours of broadcast time over two days.

But here's something even dedicated students of the game may not fully appreciate: There's very little actual football in a football game.



Photo illustration: Jeff Mangiat, photos, Getty Images (2), Associated Press (cheerleader), NFL (replay)

According to a Wall Street Journal study of four recent broadcasts, and similar estimates by researchers, the average amount of time the ball is in play on the field during an NFL game is about 11 minutes.

In other words, if you tally up everything that happens between the time the ball is snapped and the play is whistled dead by the officials, there's barely enough time to prepare a hard-boiled egg. In fact, the average telecast devotes 56% more time to showing replays.

So what do the networks do with the other 174 minutes in a typical broadcast? Not surprisingly, commercials take up about an

hour. As many as 75 minutes, or about 60% of the total air time, excluding commercials, is spent on shots of players huddling, standing at the line of scrimmage or just generally milling about between snaps. In the four broadcasts The Journal studied, injured players got six more seconds of camera time than celebrating players. While the network announcers showed up on screen for just 30 seconds, shots of the head coaches and referees took up about 7% of the average show.

If you think the networks are a little too fond of cheerleaders, you may be mistaken: In these broadcasts, only two networks showed cheerleaders at all. And when they did, they were only on camera for an average of three seconds. "We make it a point to get Dallas cheerleaders on, but otherwise, it's not really important," says Fred Gaudelli, NBC's Sunday Night Football producer. "If we're doing the Jets, I couldn't care less."

Football—at least the American version—is the rare sport where it's common for the clock to run for long periods of time while nothing is happening. After a routine play is whistled dead, the clock will continue to run, even as the players are peeling themselves off the turf and limping back to their huddles. The team on offense has a maximum of 40 seconds after one play ends to snap the ball again. A regulation NFL game consists of four quarters of 15 minutes each, but because the typical play only lasts about four seconds, the ratio of inaction to action is approximately 10 to 1. (At the end of a game, if one team has a lead and wants to prevent the other team from scoring again, standing around and letting the clock run down becomes a bona

Buick LaCrosse On Display Today. Download The Wall Street Journal for iPad from the iTunes App Store. Or, for more information go to wsj.com/ipad. BUICK LACROSSE. Wall Street Journal subscribers get full access for a limited time - free.

Saturday's Game Predictions

MLB AL:MIN Twins 4.4, NY Yankees 4.1
MLB NL:STL Cardinals 4.8, CIN Reds 3.4
NHL:CHI Blackhawks 3.5, SAN Sharks 3.3

See all of today's predictions »

Get more game forecasting from Accuscore »

Most Liked on Facebook

Login

You need to be logged into Facebook to see your friends' recommendations

Google Says It Mistakenly Collected Data on Web Usage - WSJ.com

1335 people shared this.

A Lament for the Class of 2010 - WSJ.com

907 people shared this.

Detroit to Demolish 10,000 Abandoned Properties - WSJ.com

2294 people shared this.

NBC Cancels 'Law & Order' After 20 Seasons - WSJ.com

571 people shared this.

Facebook social plugin

Video

fide strategy).

For broadcasters, filling these idle moments is always a unique challenge. Ken Crippen, the executive director of the Professional Football Researchers Association, who has a collection of broadcasts that date back to the 1930s, says most early telecasts showed a constant feed of the field with a few shots of the scoreboard for variety. "It was basically just constant, live action," he says.

Things began to change in the mid-1960s, when instant replay became commonplace. By the 1970s, broadcast crews had expanded to an average of eight cameras and three production trucks, a number that has only continued to grow. Mr. Gaudelli says that by the 1990s, some football broadcasts showed about 100 replays per game.

In the past decade, regular-season football telecasts have evolved into major productions that can cost between \$150,000 and \$250,000. Networks say they have anywhere from 80 to 200 people on hand per game with dozens of cameras. (NBC says its broadcasts require seven production trucks.) Producers say all this technology has made it easier to show shots of wacky fans, demonstrative coaches on the sidelines and video segments prepared before the game.

The result is that broadcasters have so many options that they have to spend a lot more time planning what to show—and what not to. Lance Barrow, CBS's lead football-game producer, says his crew meets for several hours with players and coaches from the home and road teams in the two days before kickoff just to prepare material to present during dead time. In August, Bill Brown, a senior football producer for Fox, says he met with about 100 colleagues at a conference center in New York to prepare the network's game plan for the season.

News Hub: NFL Games Lack Real Action

How much football is actually shown (and played) during the average football telecast? The answer, based on a frame-by-frame analysis of four games is an average of 10 minutes and 43 seconds. WSJ's David Biderman reports.



According to Mr. Brown, there are often so many graphics and fillers at his crew's disposal that they've had to take pains to make sure they don't commit what he describes as the "mortal sin" of football broadcasting: missing a snap. "That's absolutely a jarring thought," Mr. Brown says.

For this study, The Journal broke down every frame of the broadcasts for four games on four networks on one weekend in late December. These included games between the Buffalo Bills and Atlanta Falcons on CBS, the Green Bay Packers and Seattle Seahawks on Fox, the Dallas Cowboys and Washington Redskins on NBC and the Chicago Bears and Minnesota Vikings on ESPN. Each shot in every broadcast was timed and logged in one of 22 categories.

In this sample of games, the networks showed some significant differences. ESPN showed 24 minutes worth of replays in its game, which was 41% more than the average of the other three networks. Jay Rothman, ESPN's senior coordinating producer for Monday Night Football, attributes this to the presence of Minnesota's star quarterback, Brett Favre. Mr. Favre, he says, is a "move-the-meter guy," who warrants a lot of extra attention.

In its game, NBC devoted more than twice as much time to nongame video packages as its competitors (decades-old pictures of John Madden with his wife, anyone?). CBS devoted 40 seconds to showing Atlanta's kicker, Matt Bryant, warming up to make a kick, which was more time than the other three networks devoted to kickers combined. (The kick was blocked).

In its game, Fox showed about 37% fewer replays than the other networks. Fox also showed about 16% more shots than the other networks of players on the sidelines.

When it comes to showing the cheerleaders, CBS won the day with about seven seconds. NBC had just over four seconds, and Fox and ESPN had no cheerleaders whatsoever. "Cheerleaders are bigger in college," says Mr. Brown of Fox, who notes that NFL cheerleaders from the visiting teams don't travel to road games and aren't as ingrained in the game as they are in college. "It's not that we don't like them," adds ESPN's Mr. Rothman. "They're just not our motivation."

What's in a Game?

Click here for sortable charts to see how every minute is accounted for in a sampling of four recent NFL games on different networks.



The real test for any football-broadcast crew is what they do in a blowout. In cases like these, producers say they have no choice but to stray from on-field action. In the second quarter of the CBS game, for instance, the Bills and Falcons only managed to score three points. In that time, there were 88 shots of off-field elements, including 31 shots (186 seconds) where the cameras were trained on the two teams' coaches. That was 54% more

Still Kicking at Age 50 and Beyond
3:49

2010 World Cup: Soweto Rebuilds From Troubled Past
2:16

Brazil, Argentina React to World-Cup Picks
1:54

More in Sports Main

- Golfs Big Problem: No Kids
- Fantasy Phenoms: Worth the Wait?
- Lookin at Lucky Wins Preakness
- Is Strasburg the Best Prospect Ever?
- Confident U.S. Presents World Cup Bid

Most Popular

Read Emailed Video Commented

- Google Collected Data on Web Usage
- Golfs Big Problem: No Kids
- Opinion: Michael Barone: In Utah, A Tough Year for the Overdog
- Detroit: Tear-Down City
- Bright, Dying Star: The American WASP

Most Read Articles Feed

Latest Tweets

Follow

"Though unimpressed Balt-born wife and brother in law say this 2010 Preakness infield is like St Bart's compared to the old days"

17 hrs 39 min ago from wsjcouch (Jason Gay)

"In the notorious Preakness infield. Wow. If you're planning a wedding or a special anniversary...do consider it"

19 hrs 6 min ago from wsjcouch (Jason Gay)

"Going to see a man about a horse. No, seriously. Inbound to Preakness 2010."

1 days 16 min ago from wsjcouch (Jason Gay)

"#Strasburg is a peg for the age-old question: in fantasy baseball, how much weight to give a phenom in the minors. http://on.wsj.com/9XbHGz"

1 days 1 hrs 4 min ago from WSJSports (WSJ Sports)

"What #tennis can teach #golf about attracting young players. http://on.wsj.com/9S4jJm"

1 days 1 hrs 5 min ago from WSJSports (WSJ Sports)

Latest Headlines

- BP Expects Siphon to Work
- Episcopal Church Ordains Gay Bishop
- Obama Pushes Reform to Stop Predatory Lending
- Criminal Probe Confirmed in Mine Blast
- Man Struck by Train in Queens
- U.S. Soldier Killed in Afghanistan
- Primaries Reflect Voter Unrest
- For N.Y. Fed Chief, a New Fix-It Job
- Atlantis Lifts Off on Final Voyage



than the average amount in any other quarter in that game.

When the Cowboys-Redskins game flagged in the second half, NBC turned to the activities of Cowboys owner Jerry Jones and

Redskins owner Daniel Snyder—both of whom were sitting in their luxury boxes. Together, they got about eight seconds of air time in the first and second quarters when the game was close and more than 55 seconds in the third and fourth when the Cowboys had things firmly in hand.

The most surprising finding of The Journal's study—that the average game has just 10 minutes and 43 seconds of actual playing time—has been corroborated by other researchers. In November 1912, Indiana University's C.P. Hutchins, the school's director of physical training, observed a game, stopwatch in hand, between two independent teams. He counted 13 minutes, 16 seconds of play. During last week's Wild Card games, Mr. Crippen, the football researcher, dissected the broadcasts and found about 13 minutes, 30 seconds of action.

But while the game itself hasn't changed much, there's no question the broadcasts have evolved quickly.

Mr. Gaudelli of NBC, who has broadcast football games since 1990, says the good old days weren't always so good. "I tell our production assistants who are in their 20s that they should have to learn how to edit like we did when men were men," he says.

Write to David Biderman at David.Biderman@wsj.com

More Headlines

MORE IN [SPORTS MAIN](#)

Email Printer Friendly Order Reprints

Tools Sponsor: TRY EMAIL MARKETING FREE FOR 60 DAYS!

Like 6,095 people like this.

Share:

Wines of the Month Club

We Guarantee Only Handcrafted Wines From Real Working Wineries. www.CaWineClub.com

1 tip of a flat belly

Cut down 3 lbs of your belly every week by using this 1 weird tip. www.MyAllNaturalWeightLoss.com

Wine Spectator magazine

Get 2 Risk-Free issues. Direct from the publisher. www.winespectator.com

Add a Comment

JOURNAL COMMUNITY

We welcome your thoughtful comments. Please comply with our [Community rules](#). All comments will display your real name.

Track replies to my comment

[Go to Comments tab](#)

Editors' Picks



'Robin Hood': Why So Serious?



Golf's Big Problem: No Kids



Bright, Dying Star: The American WASP



Ten Great Trips



Perfect Porsche: 911 Turbo Cabriolet

[BACK TO TOP](#)

WSJ.com Account:

- [My Account](#)
- [Subscriber Billing Info](#)

Create an Account:

- [Register for Free](#)
- [Subscribe Now](#)

Help & Information Center:

- [Help](#)
- [Customer Service](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [New on WSJ.com](#)
- [Tour the new Journal](#)

About:

- [News Licensing](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Advertise Locally](#)
- [Conferences](#)
- [About Dow Jones](#)
- [Privacy Policy - Updated](#)
- [Subscriber Agreement & Terms of Use - Updated](#)
- [Copyright Policy](#)
- [Jobs at WSJ.com](#)

WSJ.com:

- [Site Map](#)
- [Home](#)
- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [New York](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Markets](#)
- [Market Data](#)
- [Tech](#)
- [Personal Finance](#)
- [Life & Style](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Careers](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Small Business](#)
- [Corrections](#)

Tools & Formats:

- [Today's Paper](#)
- [Video Center](#)
- [Graphics](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [Topics](#)
- [Guides](#)
- [Alerts](#)
- [New sletters](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Journal Community](#)
- [WSJ on Twitter](#)
- [WSJ on Facebook](#)
- [WSJ on Foursquare](#)
- [My Journal](#)
- [Portfolio](#)

Digital Network

- [WSJ.com](#)
- [Marketwatch.com](#)
- [Barrons.com](#)
- [SmartMoney.com](#)
- [AllThingsD.com](#)
- [FINS.com](#)
- [BigCharts.com](#)
- [Virtual Stock Exchange](#)
- [WSJ U.S. Edition](#)
- [WSJ Asia Edition](#)
- [WSJ Europe Edition](#)
- [WSJ India Page](#)
- Foreign Language Editions:
 - [WSJ Chinese](#)
 - [WSJ Japanese](#)
 - [WSJ Portuguese](#)
 - [WSJ Spanish](#)

Copyright ©2010 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

