



By Larry Armstrong for USA TODAY

Fran Charles, left, and analyst Rod Woodson prepare to tape *NFL Total Access* on lif. The NFL hopes to raise the NFL Network's profile with more original programming.

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For a closer look at the NFL



Go behind the scenes at the NFL Network with a photo gallery at nfl.usa today.com. Plus, Jarrett Bell previews Week 1 in The Bell Tolls and Pete O'Brien, Deborah Barrington and Nate Davis offer fantasy lineup tips in our Fantasy Playbook video.

this is how the game will be played," he says. "I don't think that's anything but good business."

The *Houston Chronicle's* veteran football columnist, John McClain, views the rule as one of the most blatant money grabs he's seen in 31 seasons covering the NFL.

"They're trying to drive traffic to NFL.com and the team websites so they can jack up the advertising" rates, says McClain, who appears regularly on video and audio postings on the newspaper's website. The 45-second rule is "about putting more money in the pockets of the owners — as if they don't have enough already."

The NFL takes in more than \$6 billion in annual revenue. The average value of NFL teams skyrocketed from \$288 million in 1998 to \$898 million in 2006, says Mike Ozanian, senior editor at *Forbes*, which annually publishes its valuations of pro teams. That's more than twice as much as the average \$431 million value for MLB franchises last year.

Gilbert Bailon, president of ASNE and publisher and editor of *AIDia*, a Spanish-language newspaper owned by the parent company of *The Dallas Morning News*, calls the 45-second rule "ridiculous."

"It's actually minimizing how much coverage there is out there," Bailon says.

"Most people don't think 'Let's go to DallasCowboys.com' to get their news. They go to their local papers and TV stations."

ASNE and other groups, including the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) and the Radio-Television News Directors Association, are speaking out against another new NFL rule that requires sideline photojournalists to wear vests bearing logos of Canon and Reebok, the league's official camera and outfitter, respectively. (Photographers wear red vests with both logos, videographers black vests with Reebok's.)

The corporate symbols are too small to be visible to a TV audience, the NFL's McCarthy says. Photographers have worn vests with similar logos at Super Bowl XLI, college football's Tostitos Fiesta Bowl and several Olympic Games, he notes.

Jim Straight, executive director of NPPA, says turning sideline photographers into "walking billboards" compromises their integrity.

In a July 22 editorial, the *Chicago Tribune* said it would not allow its photographers to shoot games in the vests.

George de Lama, the *Tribune's* managing editor for news, says the newspaper now has decided that its photographers will shoot games from the sidelines this season while covering the logos on the vests with tape.

The NFL's McCarthy says the league won't revoke the credentials of photojournalists who cover or obscure the corporate logos.

Even so, the dispute has NPPA President Tony Overman, a photojournalist for *The (Olympia, Wash.) Olympian*, wondering whether the NFL's push to make independent photographers wear ads could lead to the league removing them from the sidelines, replacing them with NFL shooters and forcing the news media to pay for images.

"If something embarrassing happens, they wouldn't release those photos," Overman says.

The press restrictions mark the "first time the NFL has put their claws out to control the media," says blogger Anna-Megan Raley of the *Houston Chronicle*.

Redskins shape their coverage

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell has increased journalists' access to players and assistant coaches this season, says Alex Marvez, president of the Pro Football Writers Association and senior NFL writer for FoxSports.com.

And a year after banning all local TV affiliates from the sidelines with the exception of one "pool" crew, the NFL is allowing up to five local camera crews from each club's market this season. The 2006 restriction was put in place after complaints from the NFL's network partners that sidelines had become too congested.

McClain links the NFL's efforts to turn media access into new rev-

The AFC and NFC championship games in January grabbed bigger audiences than the premiere that month of *American Idol*, Fox's entertainment juggernaut, as well as the Academy Awards, Emmy Awards, Grammy Awards and Golden Globes.

"There's nothing with as much pop as NFL football," says Fred Nance, one of five finalists for the commissioner's job last year.

► **Popularity:** Pro football has ranked as America's most popular sport in the Harris Poll since 1965. In January, the polling firm found that more than twice as many fans (29%) named

attendance rose for the fourth season in a row to a record 67,738 a game.

"I'd like to be in a business where I knew that I had a lot of protection from competition and it's guaranteed profits," says Patrick Rishe, associate professor of economics at Webster University.

► **Value of franchises:** As a group, the NFL's 32 franchises are the most valuable in U.S. sports, says Mike Ozanian, senior editor at *Forbes*. The average value of NFL teams was \$898 million in 2006, more than twice the \$431 million average of Major League Baseball teams.

enue to the influence of relatively new team owners such as the Redskins' Snyder, a former direct marketing tycoon who bought the team for \$800 million in 1999.

Snyder has created tension between the team and the local media by creating his own news coverage of the Redskins and team-produced programming.

To try to drive fans to their website, the Redskins don't allow local newspapers such as *The Washington Post* to run online video clips.

Since adding a broadcast production studio at its practice facility last summer, the team produces its own TV shows and sells them to local stations. Snyder has spent \$36 million for six radio stations in the Washington and southeast Virginia regions that broadcast the team's games and can carry team-produced programming.

"The Post is not allowed to do any online video at all," says Emilio Garcia-Ruiz, the newspaper's assistant managing editor/sports. "I think it hurts the fans. I think the fans should be able to get as much objective reporting as possible."

Says Redskins spokesman Karl Swanson: "At some point you have to realize the world has changed. The NFL is a content monster, and people want that content. There's

no secret about this. The people who are complaining want to slap that film on their website and get a sponsor for it."

Mark Yost, author of *Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How the NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History*, says Snyder is the prototypical owner today.

"The guy is playing fantasy football with real people," Yost says. "You can't argue with his business sense."

So will the NFL eventually try to supplant independent media with in-house organs that play down incidents such as crimes committed by players and other bad news?

Grubman says the NFL wants only to control its copyrights and trademarks, not media coverage.

"Just the opposite," he says with a smile.

"But we want it to be news, not event production."

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Corrections & Clarifications

USA TODAY is committed to accuracy. To reach us, contact Reader Editor Brent Jones at 1-800-872-7073 or e-mail accuracy@usatoday.com. Please indicate whether you're responding to content online or in the newspaper.

An Aug. 23 story about executive branch travel misstated a comment by Ira Kaye, the Treasury Department's senior counsel for ethics. Kaye said a government official's trip paid by an outside group could pose a conflict of interest if the group has business before the official's agency, even if the official is not involved.