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Monday night at Gillette? Some fans are punting

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Additional traffic at rush hour makes getting to the stadium even more of a challenge on weeknights.

By Dugan Arnett

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For the record, Paul McCarthy isn't afraid of a little discomfort.

A Patriots season ticket holder for 23 years, he's endured every dreadful game-day condition imaginable. Single-digit temperatures. Pouring rains. Back in 2002, he sat through a veritable blizzard during the team's famed "Snow Bowl" victory over the Oakland Raiders.

But the prospect of attending a weeknight game at Gillette Stadium — a nightmarish hellscape of clogged roadways, traffic pileups, and unmaneuverable parking lots — is where the Pelham, N.H., resident draws the line.

"Not even interested," says McCarthy, who long ago ditched his tickets to this Monday night's game against the visiting Baltimore Ravens. "Don't wanna go."



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In other NFL locales, a Monday Night Football appearance might be an event worthy of civic celebration, of weeklong buildup and raucous pregame parking lot scenes. But in New England, at least for some, it's something to be tolerated — or, in many cases, avoided altogether. For them, getting there, and getting home again, sometimes is not worth the hassle.

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“The night games would be the first to go,” says Justin Belair, a season ticket holder who admits to skipping the majority of Patriots weeknight games, including this Monday’s. “You post the tickets for sale, or look to donate or give to clients or friends.”

The numbers, certainly, seem to back that up.

According to SeatGeek, a resale ticket company, the Patriots are one of the few teams in the NFL whose ticket demand shrinks for a Monday night game. On average, tickets to a 1 p.m. Sunday game (\$282), 4 p.m. Sunday game (\$307), and Sunday night game (\$324) fetch considerably more on the secondary market than does a Patriots Monday night matchup (\$228).

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The only tickets cheaper, in fact, are those for Thursday night games, which pose the same logistical challenges as a Monday night tilt, without the added prestige.

Despite the dip in Monday night demand, however, it's not as if the team is hurting for fans. Plenty are still willing to brave the hassles of a weeknight game to see the Patriots live, and Monday night's contest, like every New England game since 1994, has sold out.



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Patriots season ticket holder Sahal Laher has had his fill of weeknight games, but an invitation to watch from a suite is one reason he plans to be in Foxborough this evening.

“It’s a necessary evil,” says Al Messer of Windham, N.H., a season ticket holder since ’83. “If they’re putting a good product on the field, if you’re a true fan, you’re going to make the effort to suck it up.”

But as anyone who has made the Gillette pilgrimage for a game can attest, getting in and out of the stadium even in the best conditions can be daunting. Add in the rush-hour traffic and time constraints of a weeknight, and it can become what many insist amounts to a two-day commitment.

Because leaving the office at 5 p.m. and making it into the stadium for an 8:30 p.m. kickoff can be a tight squeeze, many fans take Monday afternoon off work.

Forget tailgating, a staple of Sunday afternoon games. By the time fans inch into the stadium, many have little time to grab a concession-stand burger, let alone fire one up on a parking lot grill. The late kickoff, meanwhile, means the game won't wrap up before 11:30 p.m. Add an hour or more of crawling parking lot traffic, plus the commute, and it's not uncommon for many fans to arrive home after 2 a.m.

"Years ago, I [could] just drag myself into work" the next day, says Scott Hannula of Groveland, who tends to arrange a late arrival to work the day after a weeknight game. "But I feel like at this point in my life, I probably don't need to be a zombie."

Is it any surprise, then, that even some diehard fans are happy taking a proverbial knee?

Take Sahal Laher, a longtime season ticket holder who, after years of battling weeknight traffic only to arrive home around 2 a.m., has had his fill of weeknight games.

When the Patriots hosted the Houston Texans in a Thursday night meeting earlier this year, he gifted the tickets to a neighbor rather than go himself. And while he does plan to attend this Monday's game, he's quick to point out that the decision stems more from circumstances — an invitation to watch from a suite; a prime opponent in the playoff-contending Ravens — than anything else.

Were the Patriots playing, say, the lowly 49ers, Laher admits, "the juice wouldn't be worth the squeeze."

If there's a silver lining to the Monday night hassles, it's that the cheaper secondary-market ticket prices can open things up for fans not willing or able to swing the cost of a Sunday game.

As Chris Leyden, a spokesman for SeatGeek, points out: "Because the Patriots are one of the most in-demand teams in the NFL, weekday games actually offer an incredible value."

Still, for some, skipping a trip to Gillette on Monday is hardly a sacrifice.

McCarthy, for instance, envisions his Monday night going like this: At some point in the evening, right around the time Route 1 is choked with game-night traffic, he'll cook up some steak tips on the grill. Later, as game-time approaches and his season-ticket-holding brethren are filing into the stadium or waiting in line for beers, he'll be settling into his recliner.

For the next three hours, he'll watch the Patriots and Ravens do battle from the comfort of his home.

And after the game, he'll flip off the TV and make the short walk to the bedroom.

"It'll be lights out by midnight," he says, "no matter what happens."




JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Fans stayed warm with a fire in a Gillette Stadium parking lot prior to a 2015 Monday night game against the Bills.

Matt Rocheleau of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Dugan Arnett can be reached at dugan.arnett@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@duganarnett](https://twitter.com/duganarnett).

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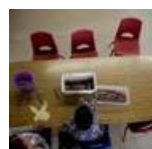
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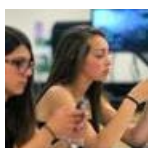
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