Opinion: Super Bowl ends, withdrawal and despair begin

By Rich Lewis
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My mother and I will be getting together tonight to watch the Super Bowl.

We’re both transplanted New Englanders so we don’t have a dog in this fight — the team from Baltimore killed our dog two weeks ago.

We felt pretty bad about that — but not nearly as bad as we and millions of others Americans are going to feel tomorrow morning when we wake up and realize we won’t be able to watch another football game for seven months.

Dr. Angelos Halaris, a psychiatrist with the Loyola University Health System, says it happens every year.

“When the football season is over and there’s no other game on the schedule for months, you’re stuck, so you go through withdrawal,” Halaris said. He says it’s worse than quitting smoking. You can always grab a cigarette if the pain is too much to bear — but you can’t order the NFL to resume play in March.

So tread lightly around the house and office for the next few days lest you set off a dopamine-deprived football fan. In fact, everybody should just stay home for a while.

Meanwhile, Halaris has some suggestions for coping with your feelings of loss and despair.

1) “Don’t go cold turkey. Watch football on YouTube, or on recordings, in gradually diminishing amounts.” If you forgot to record any games this year, or have no clue what YouTube is, you could draw little cartoons of your favorite players in action.

2) “Share your feelings of withdrawal and letdown with a friend or spouse.” Until your friend or spouse smacks you in the head and tells you to get a life. You could also share your feelings with a psychiatrist like Dr. Halaris — but he’ll charge for it.

3) “Football withdrawal is not serious enough to require antidepressants or other medications. And do not self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.” I’m not sure about that one. I’m mean, you’d only be doing it for seven months.

4) “Buck up. You’re just going to have to basically tough it out until football starts up again.” Yeah, you can always watch golf.

For us non-partisans, it’s tough to decide who to root for today.
The Baltimore Ravens are led by a grizzled, old linebacker named Ray Lewis who is going to retire after the game. I admit I’m favorably disposed toward a player with “R. Lewis” on the back of his jersey. All publicity is good publicity.

I can even overlook the fact that Lewis was facing murder and aggravated assault charges back in 2000 — until he took a plea bargain that included testifying against two co-defendants in the case. Ancient history.

But I am concerned that he was accused this week of spraying liquified deer antlers up his nose in violation of NFL rules. The antlers are hacked off when they are covered with fuzz, which gives a whole new meaning to the phrase “warm and fuzzy.” And it sort of erodes that “warrior” image.

I could root for the San Francisco 49ers. They have a young quarterback named Colin Kaepernick who has more tattoos than Queequeg and can throw a football as well as Melville’s character threw a harpoon.

But last week 49er cornerback Chris Culliver announced that gay players wouldn’t be welcome on his team. “They gotta get up out of here,” he declared.

He later apologized, but then two of his teammates kept the discrimination ball rolling by denying they had participated last summer in making a widely praised, team-sponsored video condemning bullying of gays.

“I didn’t make any video,” said linebacker Ahmad Brooks.

“I never went (to make any video),” declared tackle Isaac Sopoaga. “And now someone is using my name.”

Right — except you can watch the video at http://tinyurl.com/8wejnav. Guess who’s in it?

The video is titled “It Gets Better,” but every time a 49er talks, the negative publicity just gets worse. I’m sure that even some San Franciscans aren’t feeling too good about their team right now. Did these guys forget what city they represent?

At that same time, I probably shouldn’t bother rooting for either team because the outcome may already be determined by a Higher Power.

A national survey taken last week by the Public Religion Research Institute found that 27 percent of Americans (and 38 percent of white Evangelicals) “believe that God plays a role in determining which team wins sports events.”

An even greater number, 53 percent, say that God rewards athletes who have faith with success. Tim Tebow notwithstanding.
So when that running back who never fumbles suddenly drops the ball for no reason, or a gust of wind blows that crucial field-goal off course — well, you’ll know where Touchdown Jesus had his money.

So mom and I will stretch out in front of the TV and absorb the last few hours of football.

And when she asks me which team I think is going to win, I’ll stroke my beard and reply, “The one coached by the guy named Harbaugh.”