

The Dawgmeister's Recommended Rules Changes in Football, Basketball, & Soccer

FOOTBALL

I have never understood how a game that is so rigorously contested and so fun to watch is decided by field goals, which have pretty much nothing to do with the rest of the game. I mean no disrespect to field goal kickers, several of whom I have personally known, liked, and admired, from Blair Walsh to Marshall Morgan. I say this in the interest of having football games be decided by football plays, rather than field goals kicked by a guy who spends all but about a minute of every game on the sidelines preparing to kick a ball between and over a set of poles, an action that resembles no other part of the game.

My solution: Eliminate field goals and 1-point extra points, and have kickoffs managed with punts, as they often are following safeties. In their place, change the scoring so that if a team ends a drive inside the 20, they are awarded 3 points; if a team ends a drive in the endzone, they get 3 more; and after touchdowns, they run a play for 2 more. Most teams kick field goals inside the 20 when they don't score touchdowns, so this rule would simply provide the 3 points and not make an otherwise irrelevant player the determining factor in scoring.

This rule would add whole new layers of strategy and make fourth down the most interesting down of a series, rather than the least. If you are on the 19 yard line, should you risk a pass play and thus a sack that would end the drive outside the 20? If it's fourth and 3 on the 16, do you go for the first down or the score? The scenarios are endless, and so would be the fans' interest.

While I'm fixing things, how about, for the college game, making receivers get two feet in bounds, and declaring a runner down when he's tackled and not just when he slips. These kids are mature enough to handle it.

BASKETBALL

The end of a basketball game is typically what the rest of the game is not. Instead of having the game decided in the flow of the competition, it ends up with magnificent, well-conditioned athletes walking up and down the floor in an endless series of fouls and free throws. Free throws are a necessary part of the game. But when fouling in the hopes that the other team misses provides the primary strategy for teams as the clock ticks down, something's got to change.

I propose two small modifications to basketball that I believe would make the endings of close games a lot more interesting to watch, and probably to play. Both would only

concern the last 90 seconds of regulation and the last 90 seconds of overtime periods. My solution to the current tedium of foul shots and timeouts is that, during those periods, *any foul would result in the offended team getting the point value of the foul, with one-and-one fouls resulting in a two-point award.*

That way, the end of basketball games would consist of people playing basketball and not fouling, walking, and watching such that 90 seconds on the clock takes 15 minutes in real time; and the game would be decided by the playing of basketball and not individuals shooting uncontested shots while the clock is stopped. From a fan's perspective, the game wouldn't be so uninteresting at the climax; and from a player's perspective, conditioning would become paramount since they wouldn't get such extensive rests while standing around watching foul shots.

My second modification would put a limit on timeouts so that no more than two could be called in the last 90 seconds. This approach would moderate the over-coaching that so many complain about and put the ball more in the players' hands. For fans, it would also allow the game to proceed such that excitement is maintained, rather than continually interrupted. It might allow for fewer TV commercials, and so upset sponsors, but the powers that be can schedule another TV timeout earlier in the second half so that all paychecks are cut as needed to show the games.

This plan could be piloted in the NBA Development League, which is often where new rules are experimented with.

SOCCER

Soccer is something I'm still trying to figure out, and so my suggestions are strictly those of a fan's and not those of a player's or coach's. The main problem with soccer, at least from an American point of view, is the lack of scoring. One way to alleviate this problem is to eliminate the offsides penalty, which cuts back on fastbreak scores. Eliminating this penalty would not change a lot—the games would not suddenly go from 1-0 to 16-15—but enough to maybe make the games 3-2 a little more often without changing the game's essentials.

Soccer does have one advantage over more traditionally American games, which is the relative absence of play stoppage. You pretty much have to be dead for the game to pause for more than a few seconds. In contrast, American sports are played and micromanaged down to .1 second. Once a soccer game starts, it's mostly the players, and not so much the coaches. That works for me.