

Memorandum

TO: DWTS Executive Producers
FROM: MCM Analytics Team
DATE: January 2026
RE: Voting System Reform Recommendations

Executive Summary

Our analysis of 34 seasons of *Dancing with the Stars* reveals that while the current voting system produces consistent outcomes **95.6%** of the time, **2 documented instances** of fan voting overriding judges in Top-3 placements have generated significant controversy (notably Bobby Bones in Season 27).

We recommend a **Dynamic Log-Weighting** formula combined with a **Judges' Save** mechanism to reduce such controversies by an estimated **60–70%** while maintaining fan engagement.

Key Findings

1. Current System Performance:

- Judge-Favor Index (JFI): 0.727 — outcomes moderately align with judge rankings
- Fan-Favor Index (FFI): 0.788 — fan preferences have significant influence
- Prediction accuracy of our model: 95.6%

2. Identified Anomalies:

- Bobby Bones (S27): Won despite consistently lower judge scores
- Bristol Palin (S11): Reached Top 3 with bottom-tier dancing
- Both cases involved organized fan voting campaigns

3. Professional Partner Impact:

- Pro dancers explain 38% of judge score variance
- “Star Makers” like Derek Hough provide +8.1 point average lift
- This is a feature, not a bug—pairing matters for entertainment

Recommended Changes

1. Dynamic Log-Weighting Formula

$$Score = \alpha(w) \times J\% + (1 - \alpha(w)) \times \log(1 + F\%)$$

- **Weeks 1–3:** $\alpha = 50\%$ (equal weight, build audience)
- **Weeks 4–7:** α increases 5% per week
- **Weeks 8+:** $\alpha = 70\%$ (merit-focused finale)

The logarithmic transformation dampens extreme fan vote advantages while still rewarding popularity.

2. Judges' Save Mechanism

When two contestants are in the bottom:

1. Both perform a final “dance-off”
2. Judges collectively save one based on cumulative performance
3. Prevents worst-performing contestants from advancing

Risk Warnings

1. **Fan Perception:** Some viewers may feel their votes matter less. *Mitigation:* Market as “rewarding consistent improvement” rather than “reducing fan power.”
2. **Judges’ Save Controversy:** Judges may face backlash for “subjective” saves. *Mitigation:* Use transparent cumulative score criteria.
3. **Reduced Drama:** Fewer upsets may reduce watercooler moments. *Mitigation:* The dance-off itself creates new dramatic tension.

Verifiable Predictions

Under the proposed rules, historical replay shows:

- Bobby Bones (S27): Would be eliminated Week 6, not win
- Bristol Palin (S11): Would be eliminated Week 9, not Top 3
- Extreme events reduced from 2 to an estimated 0–1 per decade

Implementation

- No changes needed to voting infrastructure
- Judges’ Save can be announced as a “dramatic twist”
- Dynamic weighting can be disclosed or kept internal
- **Recommend:** Pilot test in one season before full rollout

This analysis is based on 34 seasons, 421 contestants, and 2,777 weekly observations. Full methodology available in accompanying technical report.