

In the NBA, the way changes to the game are supposed to be introduced is via the Rules and Competition Committee. It consists of a member from each team, and it meets a couple times a year to discuss the issues that are impacting the game itself.

Each year the Mavs, and other teams put together a list of items that we think would benefit the game and propose it to the committee. Each year since I've been in the league, the results have been pretty much the same. We get shot down, as do the proposals by most other teams. What changes occur are, with rare exceptions, on the margin.

Since change doesn't come easy inside the league, sometimes creating discussion on the outside is the best forum. It's easier to get information in the hands of every GM and owner via the media than it is at an NBA meeting. I know that they all get their daily printouts of articles and usually read them. If there is any controversy at all. They definitely read them. There isn't a toilet in the NBA that doesn't have that day's NBA related articles photocopied, stapled and laying on the floor.

It's not that the NBA won't allow it or doesn't encourage proposals or discussions, they do both. The Commish has made this a point of emphasis and he has gotten results. When I first got into the league there was zero discussion at meetings I attended. Now there is a lot more valuable give and take going on. The problem now is that there isn't enough time for more than a couple issues to be proposed, and there is even less time for discussion. There just aren't enough hours at meetings. Or maybe there just aren't enough meetings. Either way, because of time constraints, team thoughts and issues beyond the most impactful financial issues are not proposed or discussed.

Which is my way of explaining why I thought it would be a good idea to offer what I have proposed, and would propose to increase scoring in the NBA.

First, is our annual request to either get rid of the charge line or at least move it further away from the basket. I have detailed our logic in a previous blog entry. Each meeting our chances of this passing are equal to Cindy Crawford saying yes to Homer Simpson for a date.

What we haven't proposed, because it would be immediately dismissed, is the following:

1. The NBA officials have a guideline for incidental contact. Their guideline is that if the incidental contact doesn't impact or impede the "Speed, Balance, Quickness or Rhythm" of the offensive player, then a foul will not be called. The logic of the guideline makes absolutely perfect sense. An offensive player may still have an advantage, even after the contact, and shouldn't be penalized for the defensive contact. The league doesn't want to blow the whistle stopping a layup over a little bump.

On the surface that is all well and good, and as I said makes perfect sense. HOWEVER, the concept of advantage is based only on the relationship between a single defender and the offensive player. If we were talking about a 1 on 1 tournament, the logic would hold up well. We aren't. In the NBA today, advantage is gained and lost as a team.

Using the same example, if I beat my man off the dribble and have half a step on him and he has his arm on my stomach slowing me down just a tiny, tiny bit, I still have him beat. But in this era of help defense and zone defense, that tiny, tiny bit of time I was slowed or pushed a tiny bit off course might not have impacted my ability to get by my defender, but it may have given a weak side help defender just enough time to get in position to defend or impact me in some way.

Before zone defenses, offenses could take defenders far enough away from the ball to open a lane to the basket. A bump might not matter. Now they can't. Defenders can be standing in the paint. They can leave the guy they are supposed to be guarding (this would have been an illegal defense before) and be close enough that the little bump can make the difference between a layup and a missed or blocked shot or a charge.

It also may have created enough time for a guard at the foul line to V back in front of a teammate standing in front of the basket while that teammate's defender jumped over to challenge my shot. My advantage as the offensive player could be completely gone in the time lost by the littlest of bumps.

That is where the rule change needs to happen. Any contact on an offensive player with the ball when going towards the basket should be a foul. If you hadn't cut your fingernails and you scrape the offensive player on the way, it's a foul. If you graze his arm, it's a foul.

By making any such contact a foul, you completely remove the officials from having to make judgements about whether the offensive player or his team has an advantage. It's an automatic foul. You open up lanes and you speed up action to the basket.

This is the point in time where all the fools rush in and talk about how the game would slow to a crawl because there would be so many fouls. It won't. Did you notice how Kobe avoided any contact when he got beat off the ball in overtime when he had 5 fouls? Defenders will make the same point not to foul guys who beat them on their way to the basket. I don't know why some people think players aren't smart enough to adjust to changes in rules. They have for years, and would with this change as well.

This change wouldn't slow the game, it would speed up the game. More players would put the ball on the floor and go to the hoop. Players might actually be able to get to the bucket. When weak side help was there, they actually might be able to get the ball to a teammate before a 3rd defender came over to help.

On the flip side, how would it hurt? What is the downside? If I'm wrong and players can't adjust, they will foul out, there will be more foul shots. More points scored with the clock stopped. Let's stop the bumping and pushing and let the players play.

One last point. What made me realize this would have such a big impact came from watching Detroit play defense. Larry Brown is brilliant. He has his guys push, pull, bump, slap just enough to put the pressure on the officials to make a call, knowing they will rarely call touch fouls. All creating just enough time for a helpside defender to come in, or for a defender to get through a pick, or for a shot blocker to get in the lane... Brilliant coaching. Take advantage of the rules as enforced.

Now its time to change the rules.

2. The next change that I would propose is to always give the benefit of the doubt to the shooter. For some reason the league has gotten away from calling touches on the elbow, wrist and body. It's not an easy call to make because this is one case where it happens so quickly, it's hard to tell if the shooter got touched or if it impacted the shot.

Officials often watch the flight of the ball to make a determination if there was contact. That works for significant contact, but it doesn't work for just a little touch to the arm or wrist or a push from the hand to the stomach of side.

My proposal would be to always give the shooter the benefit of the doubt. Shaq shoots his jump hook and gets hit on the elbow, it's a foul. Rip Hamilton gets nicked on the side by a defender trying to catch up, give Rip the benefit of the doubt. Prince goes up to defend Kobe, and the refs aren't sure if there was enough contact to affect the shot, doesn't matter, call the foul. Not calling the foul gives the defender the advantage. I say give the advantage to the offensives player.

It's time we realize that we are making it far more difficult on the offensive player and creating a distinct advantage for the defense. That's not the way it's supposed to be. Both sides of the ball are supposed to have equal opportunity to do their job. The league is so talented, if we make it fair for both, scoring will improve considerably.

This is the part where the rest of the fools rush in and tell me what they think about the Mavs and our defense and that's why I'm writing this. This isn't about that. Believe it or not, I never try to give the Mavs an advantage. I plan on owning the team a long, long time. The players and style of play will come and go over the next 25 and more years. Trying to fit the league to the team I have in any given year is stupid and short sighted.

I want to make the game a better entertainment product for our customers. If I have to suffer the fools who have nothing better to do, so be it. I suggest they read a favorite book of mine, The Innovators Dillema.

Track and Field used to be the number 1 sport in America. So did Boxing. There are tons of examples of entertainment products that took for granted that they would always be in demand and never adjusted to their customers. I don't want the NBA to be one more example in a textbook or business class 25 years from now.