

If I'm quick to criticize, it's only fair that I'm quick to praise.

Thank you David Stern. Thank you Ronnie Nunn. Thank you Stu Jackson. Because of the initiative and action taken by the NBA to call the game by the rules as written, we have seen the game become much more free flowing, and as a result the scoring is way, way up, reversing a long trend of decline.

I know that Ronnie Nunn and Stu Jackson put in a lot of hours going through tape, coming to the realization, correctly so, that contact on the perimeter slows down play, impacts shooting percentage and gives the defense an advantage that shouldn't be there.

I know there are some playground purists that think the league "should let them play". Suggesting that if there isn't a turnover or foul caused by contact that it's ok. Honestly, there is no commentary in all of NBA punditry that is stupider. The ironic thing is that those same people who call out for "let them play", are usually the same ones who consider themselves basketball purists.

Well guess what guys. Playing basketball "the right way", to quote Larry Brown's now popular phrase, means a defender should be in a defensive stance, moving his feet, arms extended, keeping his man in front of him. Playing defense the right way is not compensating for lack of defensive desire or skill by bumping, pushing, grabbing and stiff-arming. A defender does these things to compensate for lack of ability to keep up with the offensive player. There isn't a single instance of defensive contact that isn't an effort to impede an offensive player and gain an advantage.

The NBA has instances where defensive contact is allowed. In the post, etc. Now Stu and Ronnie have made it clear that contact outside of those allowed areas will be called as fouls.

This is the point where the pundits say "if you call all the contact on the perimeter, the game will take forever. It was fine like it was". Again, a stupid comment. Think about the logic behind the comment.

When there is contact initiated by a defender on an offensive player under the current rules, you force the referee to make a snap decision. Did the contact impede the offensive player? Did it give the defender an edge? Is it within the guidelines that we have established for defenders? All of this has to happen in a nanosecond. This puts the onus on the official to make a subjective decision and just complicates the job and increases the number of mistakes officials make in a given game.

The alternative that is now being enforced, takes the pressure to judge off of the official and puts it on the player where it should be. Now the defensive player can make a choice. He can play defense "the right way", without touching the offensive player. If the offensive player beats him, or puts him in a bad position, it's the defender's choice whether to touch, knowing it will be a foul, or to let him go, hoping a teammate will help.

The players, for the most part, are smart enough to make the decision. Those who can't, get in to foul trouble quickly, and put their team in the bonus quickly. More importantly, the game is far, far better because the control is completely in the hands of the players.

Better enforcement of the rules is translating into higher scoring games as players are able to move and shoot with more freedom. Defenders who can't move their feet are finding themselves in foul trouble earlier and that's leading to the bonus and more free throws being shot. Together, scoring so far this year is up about 7 points per game vs scoring through November of last year.

Here is some more evidence of how the game has improved compared to only last year.

Through November of 2003, there were 7 teams averaging 95 points or better. This year there are 19. Last year there were 10 teams scoring under 90 points. This year there are 4. Last year there was 1 team with an adjusted field goal percentage of 50 pct or better. This year there are 7.

The examples go on and on.

The best news is that defense is usually better than offense early in the season, so shooting gets better as the season goes on.

Right now we are getting the best of both worlds. Teams that can play offense and defense "the right way", with the game being decided by the players, and not by the officials.

Commissioner Stern says to expect this to continue the entire season, which is a beautiful thing.

Thank you Commish, Ronnie Nunn and Stu Jackson