

There has been a lot of discussion about the new NBA ball. Some players don't like it. Some said they will deal with it. The league says get used to it. So why the clamor ?

Simple.

The old game ball had grain that you could feel. When you shot the ball, you could feel the grain and it helped establish "touch" and control by your fingers and fingertips on the ball. As a ball was used more often, the grain wore down some, but never disappeared. In fact, as a leather ball wore down, the grain gave way. This "breaking in" process seemed to make the grain even more important and easier to control. When it got to the right balance of grain and the seams wearing down, it got to a feel that made it easier for many of the players to shoot.

Personally, I loved to play with and shoot the NBA balls over any other. There was no question any ball of the Mavs rack, other than a brand new leather ball, was easier to shoot than one of the random balls at any gym. Even setting aside that gyms kept balls over inflated, and NBA balls had the right amount of air, NBA leather balls were always easier to shoot.

So why the change ? Because as much as guys like the old leather ball, the wearing down of the leather meant that every ball was different in some subtle sense. Teams had to agree on a ball before the game. The captains of both teams would bounce the ball, play with it, squeeze it, all to make sure it was a "good ball" I've seen games where everyone screamed that the ball "sucked ". It didn't bounce enough. Or was too smooth. With both teams requesting and agreeing to change it at half time. Put another way, the difference from ball to ball was so great, that the game ball was marked with a pen and put aside on the game table so no one could switch it.

That alone is enough of a reason to change.

So are the new balls the answer ? I'm not sure. They are definitely harder to shoot and have that outdoor ball feel. What kind of feel is that ? Its bouncier and has that "you can't break me or change me , I'm designed to be indestructable and never change feel" that outdoor balls have.. Because there isn't the tactile feel of the leather grain, it feels like they tried to compensate by making the ball material somewhat sticky. Without the stickiness, the ball seems like it would feel like a bald, heavily used outdoor ball feels.

The ball also feels bouncier. Not compared to an out of the box , just inflated leather NBA ball. It feels bouncier compared to the balls that were broken in and used in games. Will this translate into a lot of long, weird rebounds. I'm guessing, but so far it looks like yes. The things don't wear down the same way as the leather balls seemed to. So far, they always play like they are new. That's going to be weird to some guys.

Will it all have an impact on the games ? I think it will at the beginning of the season. I think there will be missed dunks. I think there will be missed shots and ugly rebounds bouncing weird ways and off of guys hands.

I think guys who use a lot of spin off the backboard to finish layups will have some problems because the basic physics of this ball have some differences from the last balls. I think of the few baseball passes we see over the course of a year, we will see some sliders and curveballs thrown in because the seams don't wear down like a leather ball.

On the flipside, guys who shoot the ball better with the new ball, and there will be a few, will gain an advantage. They won't have to adjust to the ball every game like they did with an old leather NBA ball.

Did the NBA handle the introduction of the new ball the right way ?

It's too early in the season to get fined ■