

Sporting View

Should the rim be raised in basketball?

by John Musser
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Buy some new hardwood, get a pro basketball team, and you can call your arena a world-class facility, too.

This is what the people at the Erie Civic Center have done. They recently purchased a brand new basketball floor and backboards for the arena, which this summer will host all home games for Erie's newest pro franchise, the Erie Wave of the World Basketball league.

The new floor got its first test last week, as the Civic Center played host to the high school playoffs on Thursday and Friday nights. I attended the District 10 AA championship game in high school hoops between nearby Girard and Mercer County's West Middlesex on Friday night just to see how things were going at the Center.

I don't know what it was like at the previous night's games, but Friday's definitely had a championship atmosphere. Both schools sport strong followings by their respective communities, as was evident by Friday night's attendance of over 4,400 maniacal fans.

As things turned out, it was a good way for this new world class facility to initiate its new floor. Girard and West Middlesex put on a good game for the near capacity crowd. The nip and tuck affair ended with Girard on top, thanks to some good foul shooting late in the game, to win, 59-49.

A friend of mine was telling me over the weekend how there was a heated discussion in their household recently about whether the hoop should be raised in basketball to 11 or even 12 feet.

The main arguments given by the basket raisers were that scoring is too high (especially in the NBA) and that with all of these seven-footers walking around, it's too easy to dunk (of course, so are layups). Those espousing the virtues of the hoop at 10 feet gave the classic "If it ain't broke, boy, don't get out the tool box" reason.

After telling me about this discussion, I was asked for my opinion.

For starters, there has always been a lot of scoring in the NBA. However, this year it has come down. In fact, only four teams have improved their scoring average (Chicago, Indiana, Miami, and Utah) over last year, while the rest of the league has dropped. Five teams are averaging less than 100 points a game, which, if they should end the season that way, hasn't happened since the 1955-56 campaign.

Last year, only two teams averaged 103.5 points or less per game. This year nine teams are on a pace to hit at or below the 103.5 mark.

There are two reasons for this. One is that the expansion teams are slowing games down in an attempt to win games. Teams with less talent and experience are forced to do this against superior teams.

Second, defenses are getting more sophisticated, thus making it harder to score. Maybe instead of raising the hoop, perhaps we should encourage more coaches on all levels to teach defense.

As for the college game, unless you're watching an Oklahoma or Loyola-Marymount game, the score usually isn't too stratospheric.

But what about dunks? Admittedly, watching some of the seven-footers slams can be boring to watch because it looks too easy. However, I've never heard too many people complain about six-foot-six Michael Jordan putting down a jam. But this isn't my argument here.

Take the regular season finale between Syracuse and Georgetown. I reviewed the game last weekend and counted four dunks: two by Syracuse guard Stephen Thompson and one each from Georgetown's Dikembe Mutombo and Alonzo Mourning. For a game that was 45 minutes long (including overtime) and with at least five or six guys 6-7 and up on the floor the whole game, this wasn't exactly a slamfest.

I realize some games have a lot more dunks than this, but I think that there are an equal amount that have very few. Besides, I like the dunk, and I don't think I'm the only one who feels that way. I also don't mind high-scoring games, just like I enjoy watching defensive ones.

To me, the game is fine with the hoop where it is.

Who will be the number one pick in this year's NBA draft? Don't be surprised if it's Derrick Coleman of Syracuse.

The only reason to doubt Coleman as the top choice has been his questionable attitude. Lately, there has been no question. The Orange's 6-10 center/forward has shown, especially the past couple of weeks, a desire to do whatever it takes to win. That's something NBA scouts like to see.

There never has been a question about Coleman's talent. Coleman has set school records in scoring and rebounding, and is nearing the NCAA rebounding mark. Coleman is also an excellent passer and has superb court vision. Whoever has the first pick will find it difficult to pass him up.

NCAA hoop tourney causes writer to get March Madness

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Cremins' Yellow Jackets behind the light 'em-up trio of Dennis Scott, Kenny Anderson, and Brian Oliver. Tech has a tough road to Denver, but they'll be there.

In the lower half of the bracket, Syracuse will play Missouri in the sweet sixteen as long as the Fighting Irish don't get in the way. Remember, Notre Dame plays right around St. Patty's Day.

In the West Region, the first seed went to UNLV.

Ohio State plays Providence in an interesting matchup between the Big East and the Big Ten. The winner will take on UNLV, unless the Runnin' Rebels are upset by Arkansas-Little Rock. OSU or Providence could give UNLV problems.

In the bottom half of the region, a hot Arizona team should face SEC champ Alabama in the second round. That will be a close one.

Third seeded Michigan has an easy road to the sweet sixteen, with only Loyola Marymount in their way. Michigan should have

no trouble beating Arizona in the Regional semi-final, since the Wildcats are so inconsistent.

In the weakest region, the East, Connecticut will be in the final eight, unless Bobby Knight's experience in the tourney gets the Hoosiers a win over the top seeded Huskies.

LaSalle, with the best record in the country at 29-1, will have trouble in the first round against Southern Mississippi. LaSalle's schedule was too weak to prepare them for the tourney.

Duke versus Kansas in the sweet sixteen should be a thriller. Duke will go on to play Connecticut, where the coaching of Mike Krzyzewski will lead his team to an upset and into the Final Four.

In the Midwest, Oklahoma will probably play Dean Smith's Tar Heels, where UNC will be knocked out of the tourney.

The Illinois-Dayton game might surprise people a little. Dayton might upset the Illini, but it won't matter because the winner will play Arkansas after the Razorbacks defeat Princeton.

Princeton just doesn't have the Cinderella slipper this year.

In the other half of the region played at Indianapolis, the Hoyas will have no problem making it to the final eight by beating Xavier in the second round. Georgetown will have to beat a tough Purdue team, but Alonzo Mourning and Dikembe Mutombo inside will be too much for the Boilermakers. So Oklahoma will play Georgetown in the Regional final. This should be a classic game, but Oklahoma will beat Georgetown to make the Final Four.

The Sooners will play Duke in one of the Final Four matchups. Oklahoma will advance to the Final, beating Duke by a fairly large margin.

The other game matches Georgia Tech against defending champ Michigan. Nobody is going to win the title two years in a row today so Georgia Tech will play Oklahoma in the Final.

Georgia Tech will pull off the upset and win the National Championship.

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