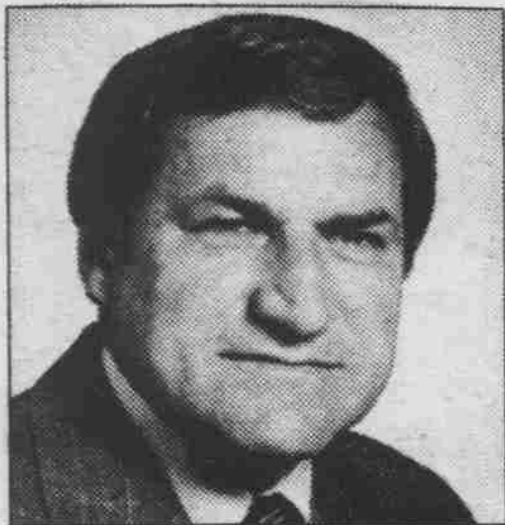


3-point rule should alter very fabric of college basketball

By SCOTT FOWLER
Sports Editor

And now, let's all welcome once again an old friend (and foe) of the Atlantic Coast Conference who has grown two feet in height and immeasurably in importance for the 1986-87 college basketball season — the three-point shot.

You thought the 45-second clock would have an effect on college basketball? Then think about this 19-9 semicircle painted on every college gym floor in the country that will alter the very fabric of collegiate hoops.



Dean Smith

...likes 3-pointer

Shooting 40 percent from the three-point line is equal to shooting 60 percent from two-point territory, as UNC guard and three-point-rule beneficiary Kenny Smith points out. "Anytime you get three for two, you take it," said Smith, grinning at the prospect like a kid who just found out he was getting a new bike for Christmas.

Forty percent from three-point range doesn't seem too difficult, either. As UCLA's Reggie Miller said, "I can almost throw it in underhanded from 19-9."

This latest version of the three-point line is two feet longer than the 17-9 chip shot that the ACC used in 1982-83, but four feet shorter than the NBA rocket launch of 23-9 (22 feet in the corners). The new three-point line is tangent to the top of the key, easily within the shooting range of Smith and Jeff Lebo.

Those two top guns for the Tar Heels, along with Ranzino Smith, should be the prime miners of three-point gold this season for UNC. Around the conference, there's Clemson's Anthony Jenkins, who led the ACC in three-pointers back in 1983; N.C. State's Bennie Bolton, Wake Forest's Rod Watson, who coach Bob Staak said can hit the shot "in his sleep," Virginia's Richard Morgan, ("We have to move him in and tell him there's no four-or five-point shot," says Virginia coach Terry Holland) and a host of other little and not-so-little men who will be elevated to a greater importance.

"Everybody was jammed in the paint last year," said UNC coach Dean Smith. "Not anymore."

Designated shooters in the mold of former Wolfpack gunner Terry Gannon will again find a niche, being counted on much like a field-goal kicker to come in, put the three points on the board and depart to let the bigger men play. For players like

Smith and Lebo, who can not only shoot the ball but also play the game in general, the three-point rule guarantees a greater prominence.

"I'm not going to try and change my game for it," said Lebo, who is often labeled one of the best pure shooters in the game. "I'm not going to dribble a step back to shoot it. But if it's open, that's a good shot for me and Kenny if we've got the board covered."

Coaches around the league give mixed reviews for the shot. Dean Smith likes it. "I think it's done for the good of the game, for the so-called have nots, for the Bucknalls," he said. "You make them shoot it in 45 seconds (taking away a delay game option), but now they can score three points with it. It's entertaining. Fans will like it, players will like it. There will be more upsets."

N.C. State's Jim Valvano, whose team won the national championship the only year the ACC has experimented with a three-point shot, doesn't like it. "It's foreign to anyone who likes the game of basketball," he complained. "Why we put the three-point shot in, I have no idea. It really makes the game upside down."

Valvano then launched into a scenario where his team had a four-point lead and was playing delay ball perfectly, yet kept getting points sliced from its margin. Much more strategy does enter the game in the late stages, because a coach whose team is behind by one point can foul quickly, knowing even if the opponents hit two free throws his squad can tie the game with a three-pointer.

"It's a strange thing when you're down five, and then suddenly you're down two," said Georgia Tech coach Bobby Cremins.

Valvano may be biased because his team last season won by firing the ball inside to Chris Washburn and Charles Shackleford and "winning ugly." Clemson, on the other hand, has not had a dominating inside player in recent years and has lost a number of games because of it. "Before, whoever had the best paint players would win," Clemson coach Cliff Ellis said. "This opens the game up."

The three-point rule surprised a number of hoops aficionados when it was announced earlier this year. Although many conferences have experimented with the shot at varying lengths, the NCAA Rules Committee's decision sent coaches scrambling to their playbooks and gave the six-foot high school player who could play good defense and shoot from long range a greater market value.

However, the Rules Committee can always undo itself. Although the trend in basketball appears to be to use a three-pointer — the NBA and International Amateur Basketball Federation have both adopted it — if enough coaches complain for a long enough period of time this year may be only a statistical blip in a two-point game. At least, that's what Valvano hopes.

"I think we'll be out of it in a year," he said.

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