

NBA changes rules in attempt to increase scoring and excitement

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Reporter

In an attempt to revive high-scoring, fan-friendly basketball, NBA franchise owners recently approved a series of sweeping rule changes to begin next season.

The biggest changes included eliminating all illegal defense guidelines and redefining what constitutes a foul. The league also instituted a defensive three-second rule and reduced the amount of time teams will have to push the ball past midcourt.

Never have such rule changes had the potential to transform the face of the pro game since the introduction of the 24-second shot clock.

However, many coaches and players were not pleased with the changes. Shaquille O'Neal, All-Star center for the L.A. Lakers, showed his dislike for the new rules by uttering a one-word response. "Stinks," O'Neal said. "I have a lot to say, but not now."

Coaches and players fostered some doubt as to the new rule changes and think the NBA's reac-

tion to shrinking attendance levels, lower television ratings and low scoring was inappropriate.

"Our belief is that the game has evolved, and the product we have presently was one that needed attention," Jerry Colangelo said in response to those doubts. Colangelo continued by citing a lack of fluidity in present NBA games as one of the reasons for the rule adjustments.

Colangelo, who is the owner of the Phoenix Suns, also chaired the committee that decided on the rule changes.

The elimination of illegal defense may have the biggest impact on the game.

Teams may now use a zone defense instead of playing man-to-man. A zone will perhaps make the pro game more like the college game.

Nevertheless, in order to prevent what Colangelo called an "out-and-out zone," a system of checks and balances has been instituted in the form of the defensive three-second rule.

This violation does not allow a defender to be in the lane for more

than three seconds if he is more than an arm's length away from his man.

Lakers Coach Phil Jackson thinks the elimination of illegal defense was an appropriate measure. "It'll be good for basketball," Jackson said.

The reduction of time a team is allowed to advance the ball across half-court will also speed up the game.

Teams will have eight seconds instead of 10 to cross midcourt. The new rule will hopefully encourage more open-court action and persuade the defending teams to press more often.

Redefining what constitutes a foul is an attempt to stop "touch" fouls that do not affect the shooter. These fouls have become routine the past few years. The ban on hand-checking will also be lifted to make the referees' jobs easier.

The new rule changes may not be perfect, but Colangelo insisted that adjustments will be made if the new rules appear to harm the game in any way.

The NBA and its fans will just have to hold wait and see.

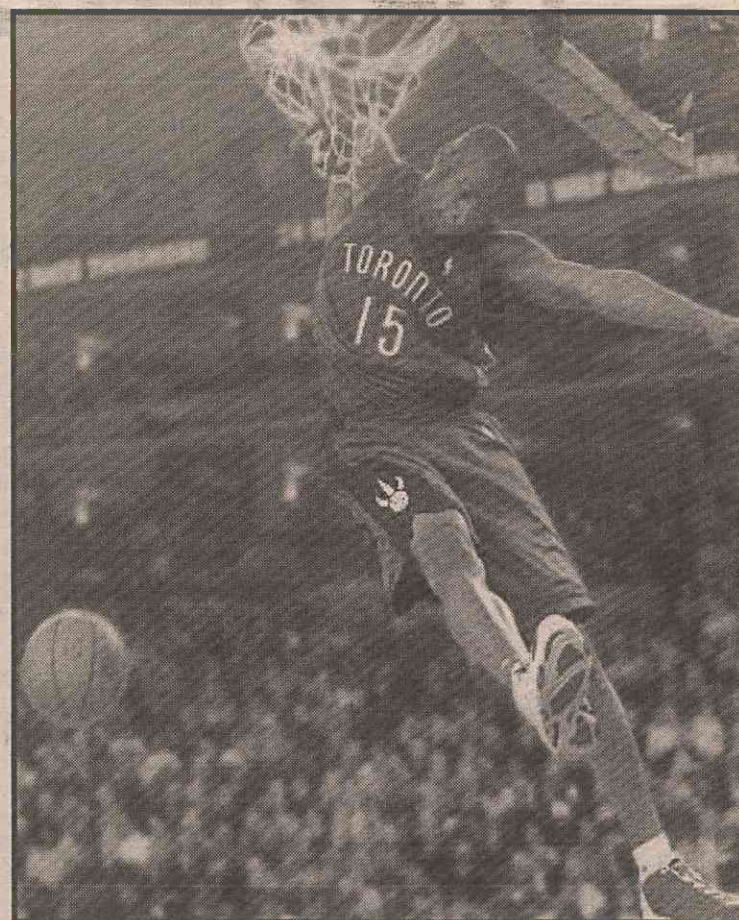


Photo Courtesy of Bob Galbrath

Zone defenses will make dunks like this more difficult for Vince Carter.

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