

VIEW From The Cheap Seats

Guest Column
Neil Duxbury

Mark Savoie is busy pretending that he is dead so that he can get out of doing a seminar. So the honourable task of filling this large space in the sports section has fallen into my hands. The first question that comes to mind is - what the hell should I write about? The answer to this is not as clear as I'd hoped as unfortunately Mark has already covered most topics in his own inimitable way. However there is one entering my mind.

How do you find the best team in a league?

Two major groups of thought come to mind. The first is prevalent in most European sports, where the team's play over the entire season is considered. The second is the (North) American way. Whoever can beat a team who has beaten everybody else deserves the crown.

So which is better? Let's consider their merits. In a championship based entirely on league play, every game from the first of the season, to the last (usually about 9 months later) is important. However by half way through the season most teams are categorized into contenders, mid-table and no hoppers and to some this may make the games of the second and third much less attractive. However you will unarguably find the best team over the entire year. The tournaments are considered inferior, something to base the rest of your season around if you've got no chance of winning the league.

On this side of the pond playoffs rule. The regular season is like an extended pre-season with teams jostling for position for the playoffs. This is especially true for leagues where more than 50% of the teams qualify for the playoffs. The one exception, baseball, is on the way to selling its soul with the new playoffs which would have started last season. However, they still only have eight playoff teams out of 30. The reason for the tendency towards ever-growing playoffs? The seductive power of the boob tube (like you need me to tell you).

My message to leagues with near 50% playoffs is this. Don't sit on the fence. Either have the best teams from the league in or all of the teams in. While TV stations will pay lots and lots of cash for playoffs, its an absolute rip-

off. You are reducing your regular season to an extended pre-season. So please, if you don't want a season just get rid of it, have 9 game playoff series from the start of the year. The whole idea of having a series is to decide the best team, so why not just have a short pre-season and start with the playoffs, you can draw for seeds. The TV companies will love it. Tension and drama from day one. It also saves the citizens of Ottawa and Hartford six months of embarrassment. Two weeks and their season's done.

Don't get me wrong. Tournaments have their place, but as a way to let several leagues do battle, not as the conclusion to one league's season. The NCAA basketball tournament is the best example of this. Due to various impracticalities, like there being too many good college teams to allow them to play each other even once in a reasonable length regular season, the transitive nature of college basketball teams, recruiting, eligibility and drafting, means that the best sixty-four teams change from year to year.

As you may gather from this, I'm in favour of a full league program rather than playoffs to decide the champion. Perhaps its just my nurturing, being from the other side of the Atlantic. However, there comes a stage when you have to stop and ask, is the sport being shown on television or manufactured by television?

The NCAA basketball tournament is also the source of my favourite conspiracy theory of the week. The question being asked around televisions all over the continent is - "How much did The First Fan have to pay the Orangemen not to win?" While basketball players aren't usually recruited on their GPA, it is usually a good idea to try to find some who can remember how many timeouts they have left.

Tuning into a maritime sports show this week I noticed that a certain Sparky hockey Red has been upping his playoff exposure with the Cole Harbour Colts of the Maritime Junior Hockey League. Good to see that he's still showing the same emotional fire that we saw in the second half of the season, though its probably just as well the check from behind wasn't from the ever tempted Kanoo.

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ments for men, women and co-eds. All intramural sports aim to develop the individual through physical activity, healthy competition and fair play.

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A sport club is comprised of a group of individuals who wish to participate in a particular sport or activity as a level of competency not normally provided in other intramural, recreational or elite program. They are a



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