

Sports Opinion

NBA action: It's a farce



Andrew Strnad

With an abundance of farewell columns this week, I thought I might as well bid my own goodbyes.

No, I won't be leaving Nebraska to pursue an entry-level job in broadcasting, I'm here to say farewell to the National Basketball Association.

With just two months left until the season ends, basketball fans are witnessing the league's final farewell.

I'm not talking about the distinct possibility that this might be Michael Jordan's last season, I'm talking about the disappearance of the NBA as we know it.

As we witnessed with Major League Baseball in 1994, the NBA is about to enter a period of labor strife.

The current labor contract is up after this season, and the players and owners are miles apart on everything.

The league regrets everything it gave the players union last time around, which included guaranteed three-year contracts for rookies.

That quagmire has led to the recent \$125 million dollar deals for three-year players like Kevin Garnett.

The players, well they're not even happy with their own union and will certainly threaten to decertify if their demands aren't met.

In all likelihood the season that lasts forever won't even begin come next November.

NBA owners are expected to lock out the players before camp begins later this summer. And even if that is avoided, fans can expect the players to walk out.

A strike would cripple a league that is already upon the brink of disaster.

Even if the season starts on time, owners are faced with a myriad of problems.

Attendance has fallen 15 to 20 percent in some cities, and the once king of the merchandise block has seen its empire crumble over the past three seasons.

The Charlotte Hornets, once known as an NBA hotbed, averaged 6,000 no-shows to its home arena this season.

That means one in four seats was empty.

Even as the NBA enters its "second season" with the playoffs, fans have already begun to tune out. Seven of the 16 teams that are in the playoffs failed to sell out their opening games.

The NBA is the ultimate corporate event. I've sworn that I will never go to another NBA game as long as I live.

It's not because of my general disgust of the unwatchable game of professional basketball, it's the inability to buy a ticket.

According to the NBA, the average ticket price is \$34. Owners are pricing fans right out of the arena.

The cheapest seat at the Bradley Center in Milwaukee, which is the third "cheapest" place to see an NBA game, is \$12.

Although part of the problem lies in the fact that when I go to a game, I get to see the hapless Milwaukee Bucks.

Nonetheless, there isn't an arena in the league where you can see the ball from row X in the upper deck.

Plus, the quality of the game just isn't what it used to be. There are only so many fans who consider Marty Conlon a professional basketball player, but thanks to expansion, he's still in the league.

Most importantly, the lack of superstars is ultimately going to hurt the NBA in the near future.

Just who will replace Michael Jordan?

Nobody.

The NBA makes no bones about it when it says it is a league of superstars.

"When marijuana isn't considered an illegal substance in your league's drug policy, you know you have a problem."

ANDREW STRNAD
Baseball fan

going to be around when Jordan retires, again.

In addition, the NBA has a serious image problem.

When marijuana isn't considered an illegal substance in your league's drug policy, you know you have a problem.

Last year, The New York Times took a poll of NBA players which revealed that more than 50 percent of the players smoke marijuana on a regular basis.

The NBA all-thug team of Latrell Sprewell, Dennis Rodman, Jayson Williams, Allen Iverson and Nick Van Exel has quite the record, and that's just the first team.

So if you're a fan, enjoy the never-ending playoffs while they last, because when they do finally end in the middle of June, that's it.

Strnad is a senior broadcasting and political science major and the Daily Nebraskan baseball beat writer.

UCLA hit with 3-year probation

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. (AP) - The UCLA basketball program was put on a three-year probation Thursday by the NCAA for violating recruiting regulations and giving improper benefits to athletes.

Former coach Jim Harrick was cited for unethical conduct for lying to school officials during an investigation. He was fired just before the 1996 season began and now is coaching Rhode Island.

In addition to the probation, UCLA was ordered to reduce official visits by recruits by six for the 1998-99 and the 1999-2000 academic years.

The violations took place from 1993-95.

The NCAA said members of the UCLA coaching staff gave entertainment and other benefits to the coach of a club team in Los Angeles whose players included potential recruits for the university.

The coach also was given complimentary tickets to UCLA games and a 1995 championship ring, the NCAA said.

Athletes were given tickets to Los Angeles Lakers' games and were allowed to receive excessive telephone calls at the athletic office.

Improper transportation and

free meals were provided to the parents of athletes or to the athletes themselves, the NCAA said.

UCLA began an investigation of possible violations in October 1996 and reported the findings to the PAC-10 conference.

UCLA, the NCAA enforcement staff and Harrick agreed to a summary-disposition process in which all parties agreed the violations occurred.

Additional penalties were not imposed even though UCLA was placed on probation in May 1997 for three years for violations in the softball program. The NCAA said violations in the basketball program occurred before the softball violations.

In considering the penalty, the NCAA Committee On Infractions said it took into consideration UCLA limiting the club coach's tickets, revisions in the record-keeping process for telephone calls and requirements that coaches and others in the program attend educational programs on NCAA rules.

The NCAA also noted that a private letter of reprimand was issued by the PAC-10 to the NCAA and that the conference conducted a compliance review with emphasis on extra benefits during the 1997-98 school year.

Cook Pavilion site of Nike Challenge

BY JAMES NICAS
Staff Reporter

College students from across the region will be able to test their physical fitness abilities and get free stuff Saturday.

The first regional Nike Swoosh Training and Fitness Challenge will be at Cook Pavilion Saturday. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. with the competition beginning at 11 a.m.

Four events will be included in the physical challenge. There will be a 6-mile relay run, a speed and agility obstacle course, fitness assessment activities and the rock - a vertical treadmill that moves as you go up.

"This event creates real positive and social interaction involving physical fitness," said Vicki Highstreet, Campus Recreation Center assistant director for instructional programming. "These events promote physical fitness, and students can get involved in activities and competition in a fun way."

Each team will consist of two men and two women. Every participant will take part in each event, and points will be awarded based on each athlete's ability.

"There is a wide variety of skills where teamwork is involved," said Andy Link, campus rec interim coordinator for fitness.

Free Nike gear will be given out to the participating teams. Individual event winners will receive added

prizes for their victories.

More importantly, the winning team will receive an all-expense paid trip to the national tournament on May 22 and 23.

At the Hollywood, Calif., event, the 10 regional winners will battle to determine a national champion.

"Teams have the ability to be recognized at the university as well as being recognized nationally with the other nine regional winners," Link said. "That will be quite an accomplishment for the winning team."

Along with student activities, Highstreet said, the fitness challenge is a new way campus rec can enhance its image across the country. Teams from Creighton, Nebraska-Omaha and St. Cloud State also will be competing in Saturday's competition.

This event also may stay at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in upcoming years. Another event that UNL campus rec holds every year is the Nike Regional Flag Football Championships.

"Every time UNL is offered a national event, it is an excellent way to promote our students and university," Highstreet said. "Only a positive can come out of it."

The first 50 teams to register get in free. All teams registered after the first 50 will require a \$25 entry fee. There are still openings available for students to participate for free. To enter a team, go to the campus rec office or call Andy Link at (402) 472-9480.

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