



The NBA lockout has now resulted in regular season games being cancelled and from all appearances it looks to be headed toward the land of the NHL. It eventually will get solved but will anyone notice?

Indeed right now outside of columnists like Bill Simmons and a few other basketball junkies, the NBA's labor problems are pretty much being met with a shrug by most everyone else, unless you're someone earning \$30,000 a year whose livelihood depends on games being played.

If the NFL lockout was the equivalent of the last episode of M*A*S*H in terms of generating interest, then the NFL lockout is like any episode of The Amazing Race. It draws some interest, even some really devoted fans, but most of the country is tuning out.

You can take my word for it or consult any number of sources but on the pecking order of television ratings, the NFL is the 1000 pound gorilla and the NBA is, perhaps, a full grown chimpanzee. Network regular season games in the NBA draw a 2.2 share, which means that of all the television equipped households in this country, only 2.2% were tuned to that game. The story is better in the NBA Finals, but that's merely by comparison. Last season's NBA Finals drew less than an 11 share.

By contrast, last season's Super Bowl was actually the most watched television program in broadcast history, surpassing that final episode of M*A*S*H. NFL regular season games that are nationally broadcast routinely draw in excess of a 10 share, similar to a NBA Finals game.

Lingering Items--Fleeting Regrets Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Friday, October 14 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, October 15 2011 5:16 AM

There are probably a dozen or so reasons you can cite for this vast difference, but however you want to choose to parse it the fact remains that the fans have spoken. Casual indifference toward the NBA lockout vs. intense interest in the NFL lockout mirrors the ratings for each sport.

I've avoided writing much about the NBA lockout because I'm four-square in the camp of the casual fan. Frankly, if the whole season was cancelled it would make absolutely no difference in my life. I understand and empathize for the vendors and all the ancillary people that depend on the NBA for their livelihood. Those folks are always the victims. But let's face it, the NBA owners and the players care so little for any of those people that it's hard to feel any empathy for the lockout's main participants.

For those that do care, though, perhaps you're scratching your head (just as you scratched it raw during the NFL lockout) as to how two sides with \$4 billion to split can't figure it out. If only it were that easy.

The reason the NBA owners and its players can't divide all that basketball related revenue is that over the last several years and through the last several contracts they've created such a byzantine economic system that almost no one at the bargaining table can even figure it out.

The NBA supposedly has a salary cap, but that's in theory only. The cap serves as merely a guideline and teams routinely blow past it because of all the exceptions that have been created to address individual situations. Then of course if you run out of exceptions it doesn't matter anyway. A team can go as far beyond the cap as it wants. It just has to pay a luxury tax.

In essence the NBA takes the worst aspects of major league baseball's system and layers on the dumbest ideas they could think of. It couldn't be worse if it was designed and overseen by Congress.

I'd be more interested in this lockout if it was about real reform, like a level playing field that recognizes the economic differences between Milwaukee and Los Angeles. But it's not. Any semblance of that was abandoned early by the owners who used a hard salary cap as an opening volley in the negotiations.

Lingering Items--Fleeting Regrets Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Friday, October 14 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, October 15 2011 5:16 AM

At this point is really comes down to deciding on the proper revenue split between the owners and the players. The owners are trying to get it to a 50/50 split and the players are resisting. It's as boring of a dispute as a mid February game between the New Jersey Nets and the Golden State Warriors.

Eventually this will get solved and in a way that the rich on both side get to remain rich. It will also get solved in a way that the average fan that bothered to care will get stuck with the bill. It always does. It would just be nice to think that one side or the other would have the common courtesy to at least give that fan a peck on the cheek before they screw him once again.

**



Lots of handwringing this week over the ill fortunes of the Ohio State Buckeyes, mainly because the fans aren't used to seeing the Buckeyes fail. They stand at 3-3 and the meltdown in Nebraska that started midway through the third quarter certainly makes a reasonable person wonder whether the Buckeyes will even become bowl eligible.

They might not, but that's less of a problem this season than it usually would be.

One of the reasons the Michigan Wolverines didn't improve much under Rich Rodriguez had everything to do with them missing bowl games every year. That extra practice time that

Lingering Items--Fleeting Regrets Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Friday, October 14 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, October 15 2011 5:16 AM

programs are given in order to prepare for a bowl game are incredibly valuable more so for the following season than the actual upcoming game.

But in the case where there is going to be an offseason coaching change anyway, that kind of prep isn't nearly as valuable unless the new head coach is on board for those practices.

At this point, even if the Buckeyes become bowl eligible, I wouldn't expect a new head coach to be hired prior to that bowl game. And before I'm accused of putting the cart before the horse, I do believe a new head coach will be hired by the Buckeyes.

This isn't an indictment of Luke Fickell, exactly, but if anything is clear at the moment it's that he just wasn't ready to assume the head job at a program this big. Part of that may be due to how little time Fickell had to prepare for that role. But a big part of it is simply due to his lack of experience as a head coach.

Fickell's good for the program and I hope he's retained by whoever is hired. But if Fickell is retained as the head coach, the team is going to continue to struggle for the several years it takes for Fickell to gain the kind of experience one needs to run a program the size of Ohio State's.

If you think it's painful watching a freshman like Braxton Miller learn on the job how to be a quarterback at the highest level of college football, triple that feeling if Fickell keeps his current job. The Buckeyes might be respectable the next few seasons but they won't be the kind of threat they were under former head coach Jim Tressel once he got through his transition year.

Right now one lesson Fickell is learning is how to control the team and I don't just mean the players. Fickell's lack of experience on the offensive side of the ball is showing as it's becoming very clear that he feels he doesn't have the gravitas to challenge Jim Bollman's decisions on offense.

The last assistant coach I can think of that's had a worse year than Bollman was Greg Robinson. Before him it was Ron English. Both were the defensive coordinators for the

Lingering Items--Fleeting Regrets Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Friday, October 14 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, October 15 2011 5:16 AM

Michigan Wolverines under Rich Rodriguez and we all know how that worked out. They were as much responsible for Rodriguez's departure as anything else.

That's not necessarily the case in Columbus with Bollman, but it's a fascinating scene nonetheless. Bollman, the Tressel confidant, strutting about the program as if he, not Fickell, is the head coach. Fickell, on the sidelines watching one 3-and-out after another, frustrated and powerless to do much about it. If Fickell has the power to overrule anything Bollman does during the week or on game day, it's only on paper.

It reminds me of the dynamic between Oakland As manager Art Howe and general manager Billy Beane as portrayed in the movie Moneyball. Howe theoretically reported to Beane but went about his job in quiet defiance of most of Beane's orders.

These are just the kinds of dynamics that demonstrates why Fickell isn't the right fit at this moment. He ascended to a role he wasn't prepared for and most everyone around the program knows it and acts like it. I don't think that changes any time soon and is fundamentally why Fickell's future with the program is as the defensive coordinator next season.

**

