

Larger action deck will create more problems

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Not long ago I received my second issue of the S-O-M Review (April 1986) and am pleased with my decision to subscribe.

I am writing because I feel compelled to comment on Dick Hunt's suggestion regarding S-O-M Basketball. I would appreciate it if you could print this because it would clear up Mr. Hunt's misconceptions and possibly provide some insights to your readers as to the difficulties of designing a table-top sports game.

Having played sports games since the age of seven and having designed my own games (including basketball), I feel qualified to speak on the subject.

Although I agree with the basic premise of having a wider range of results for split readings, Mr. Hunt's suggestion won't have near the effect he claims. In fact, if the idea were incorporated into the present version of the game, it would create more problems than it would solve.

First, Mr. Hunt claims the passing phase of the game would be improved. Although there would be a greater number of passing possibilities, his suggestion would not eliminate the assist rating that certain players receive. The reason for this is that all the expanded range does is allow for "fine-tuning;" it doesn't increase assist possibilities.

Players like Magic Johnson and Isiah Thomas (with assists ratings) will still have the same proportion of assists after their passing column is adjusted for turnovers. The reason these players have assist ratings is because they won't receive enough assists through the passing phase of the game.

The only way to eliminate the assist rating is to increase the number of passing column possibilities in the action deck and there are three very good reasons why that shouldn't be done:

(1) Although Mr. Hunt calls these belated assists, assists derived from the assist rating actually make the game more realistic. Not every assist is the cause of a basket being scored. A good number of Thomas' assists come when he hits someone like Kelly Tripucka or Vinnie Johnson coming off a screen, who then bury a 20-foot jumper. Magic Johnson also boosts his assist total when he dumps the ball inside to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who then wheels left and drops in a sky hook. Certainly the cause of these baskets wasn't the pass.

(2) If the action deck is changed, player cards for members of the Pistons, Lakers and any other team with a player possessing an assist rating would have to be reworked. These players' field goal shooting would have to be adjusted downward to compensate for the increase in free and easy hoops created by the elimination of the "belated" assist.

(3) If S-O-M were to change the action deck, then the past several editions of the cards would be incompatible with the new version and the game company would be forced to produce revised cards for past seasons if gamers are to be able to pit teams from different years against each other.

The second thing I'd like to point out about Mr. Hunt's article is that the examples of Mark Eaton and Tree Rollins aren't that accurate. Although they both have similar block ratings (Eaton: 1-20; Rollins: 1-19), Eaton will block many more shots as a result of his X-column than Rollins will.

Gamers should be sure to take into account the X-column when judging a player's shot-blocking capability, it is an excellent fine-tuning mechanism. Mr. Hunt can rest assured that Eaton will block more shots than anyone else in S-O-M Basketball - at least until next year when Manute Bol receives his first card!