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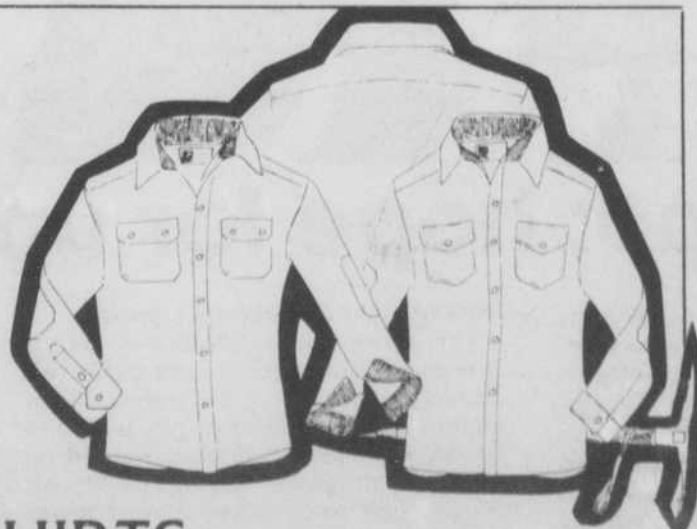
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Don't bother trying to figure it out, it just doesn't make much sense.

There are all kinds of newfangled gadgets and stripes which will be turning innocent looking basketball courts into labs to conduct all sorts of crazy experiments this winter.

For example, eight conferences will be experimenting with shot clocks this season ranging from 30 to 45 seconds, and with an even broader array of restrictions. The Atlantic Coast Conference, for instance, has a 30 second clock which will be turned off the last four minutes of the game, while the Southeastern Conference has a 45 second clock with no restrictions.

Confused? This is only the beginning.

Nine conferences will be playing with three point shots this winter. The shortest three point shots will come in the ACC, where the line is just 17 feet, nine inches from the center of the basket. The longest will come in the Big Sky, where the line is 22 feet away.

Complicating all of this further is the fact that not everyone measures the distance from the same place. Some measure from the front of the rim, others start at the backboard. No one is measuring from the first row of seats yet, but don't be surprised if someone decides to try it.

Fortunately, Pac-10 coaches have not yet given way to the tide of new wave basketball that swept the nation last spring. They are content to sit back and watch the craziness.

And it is just that. After all, isn't it the NBA that has shot clocks, three point shots — and a lot of red ink? And isn't it college basketball which has the lucrative TV contracts while the NBA struggles to get playoff games shown live, or at all? And isn't it college basketball that had almost 62,000 fans attend the national championship game last March at the Superdome in New Orleans?

One might well wonder what is going on, but one would be better off to ask why.

There are almost as many answers to that question as there are to the first one. But the primary reason is the fear that stall tactics will turn college basketball into a real sleeper, and turn fans to the NBA.

Given the NBA's ratings these days, this concern seems to lack logic. Especially when you consider that it was one game — North Carolina's 47-45 win over Virginia in the ACC tournament final last year — which instigated the rash of changes.

As recently as March of this year, the nation's coaches overwhelmingly rejected the idea of shot clocks and three-point shots. But the nationally-televised ACC final, in which UNC chose to stall the final 7:00 with a one-point lead, changed

things dramatically.

Overnight everyone and his uncle were clamoring for shot clocks and three-point shots. The game which was drawing record crowds across the country was suddenly in danger of losing those fans to a deep sleep because of "The Stall."

After all, who wants to see the likes of Ralph Sampson and Pat Ewing standing around?

It's much more exciting to see them running, gunning, and slamming. That's where the fun is.

For those who have the runners, gunners, and slammers, it is a lot of fun. And this year, thanks to the rule experiments, it's going to be a blast for them.

And a blow-out for the others. If 47-45 is bad for basketball, I wonder what the coaches will think of 102-55. If more points is what you like, more points is what you will get. But when the haves play the have-nots it will be the haves who get the extra points. So instead of putting fans to sleep with "The Stall" they will often turn them off with runaways.

A lot of fans, especially Oregon State fans, were turned off two seasons ago when Stanford slowed its Pac-10 encounter with the Beavers to a crawl to avoid being blown away.

The result was a tense game and the fans, while disgusted by the tactic, probably tuned in until the end to see who would win, whereas they might have found something else to do had the game been decided in the first 10 minutes.

By instituting the shot clock, conferences are eliminating the upset. They are also taking the ball out of the coaches hands. That is probably good. But fans like to pull for the underdog, and they also like to play armchair coach. How much coaching can the coaches — or the fans — do when the game is over five minutes after it starts.

The three point shot, on the other hand, may actually help the game in the long run. If the line is far enough away it could draw some of those packed zones out from under the basket, and in turn open up the offensive end of the court.

If there is more room for the offense to move, there will be more offense — with or without a shot clock.

Only time will tell whether or not all this experimenting is worth the confusion it will cause coaches, players and fans across the country. If it works, maybe Ralph Miller will finally be able to convince enough people to try a 12-foot high basket to combat all of that boring domination by the big guys inside the key. Or maybe someone will decide peach baskets were the best idea after all.

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