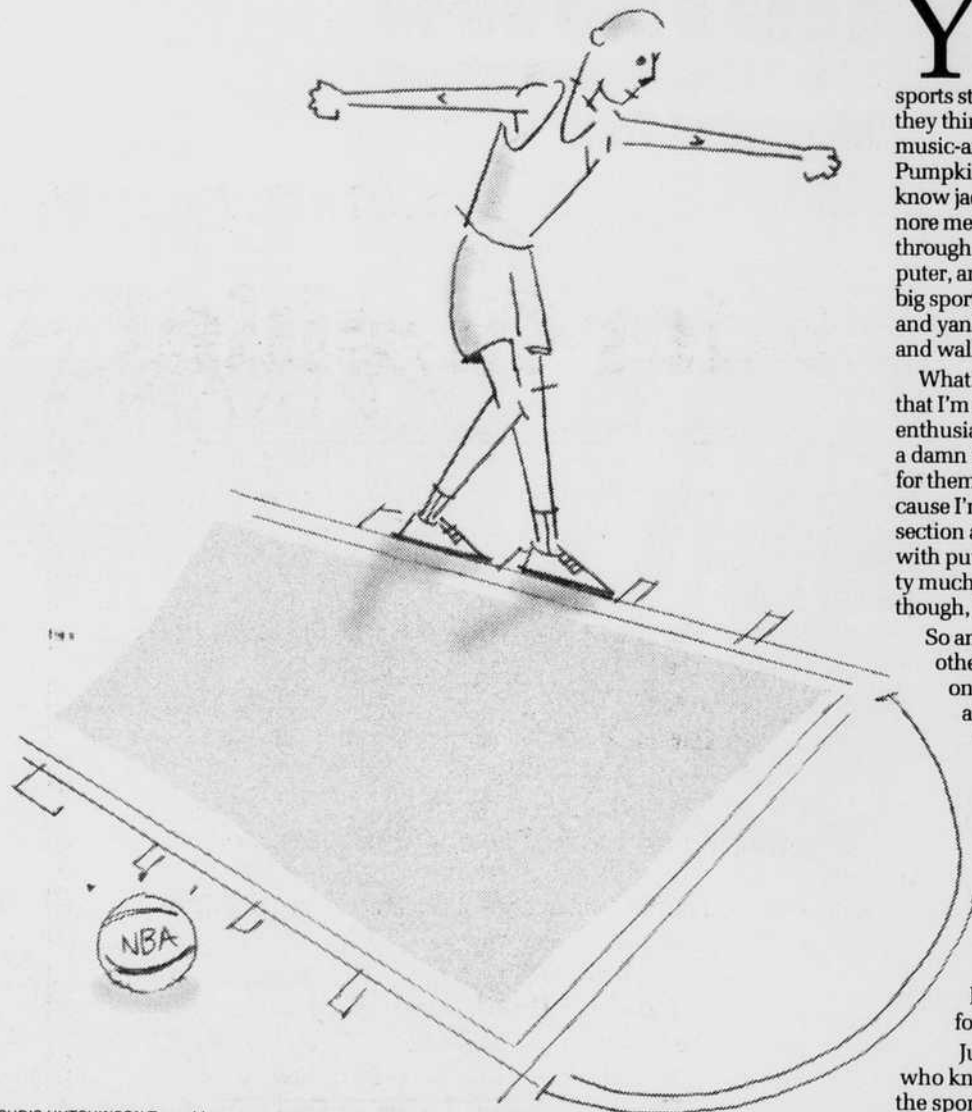


What the world would be like if life imitated sports



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

You might be wondering what this sports column is doing in the entertainment section of the paper. Honestly, it's because I'm afraid of the sports staff. They're all bigger than me, and they think that just because I'm the scraggly music-and-movies guy in the Smashing Pumpkins long-sleeve shirt, I probably don't know jack about sports. They usually just ignore me unless I'm playing music too loud through my newsroom computer, and then this really big sports guy comes over and yanks out my mouse and walks away with it.

What they don't know is that I'm a pretty big sports enthusiast who could write a damn fine sports column for them. But that's OK because I'm the editor of this section and I can get away with putting a sports column here since I pretty much do whatever I want. Incidentally, though, I hope this is entertaining.

So anyway, back to the sports column: The other night I'm watching a Knicks game on cable and I catch myself screaming, and I mean banshee-wailing, the words "three seconds!" at the NBA referee.

My girlfriend is giving me this look that's more ponderous than angry, as if she's trying to decide if I'm more of a loser for neglecting her for a basketball game or for screaming at the TV image of a guy 3,000 miles away with a feverish belief that my heckling will help him notice that Bo Outlaw's left foot has been in "the paint" for an eternity.

Just to clarify (because most people who know the minutiae of basketball read the sports pages and not the entertainment section), there's a rule in the NBA that no

player can be standing for more than three seconds on this really special part of the basketball court. To show the players that it's special, and to make it clear enough for a loser fan 3,000 miles away watching TV to notice, they paint that part of the court a bright-colored rectangle. Stand in the rectangle too long, and the ref blows his whistle and points his stubby finger at you and says, "Three-second violation!"

Now, you'd think rules based on this kind of arbitrary geometry would be unique to one sport. To the contrary, it's even worse in hockey. In the NHL, there's a blue semi-circle painted in front of each net, and that's territory solely for the goaltender. Hockey folks are absolutely vigilant about this rule, too. They've actually got a guy who lounges in an arena luxury box all game long, watching the action on about 40 different TV screens. Now, this guy's only job is that when a goal is scored, he checks using instant replays to make sure nobody was in the blue semi-circle when the puck crossed the goal line. If, God forbid, someone had the tip of his skate blade in that blue area, the replay guy's got a special red Bat-phone that dials directly down to the referee at ice level. The replay guy tells the ref to disallow the goal. Then the ref tells the P.A. announcer, and that guy tells the capacity crowd, "No goal!" Then all 30,000 fans groan together and throw their beer at the replay guy's bullet-proof, luxury box window. (In Detroit they even throw octopus!)

Now, I bring up these quirky little rules because I wonder what life would be like if we applied the same kind of painstaking diligence to real life:

"Sorry guys, no beer for the poker game tonight. The Missus painted a purple dodecahedron around my six-pack."

Evan A. Denbaum is the entertainment editor for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

OPINION



Evan A. Denbaum

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