

Shorter season? Shorter games? Silver ponders NBA format

By BRIAN MAHONEY
AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK — The future of NBA basketball could look like European soccer.

Tournaments that take place during the season along with league games intrigue Commissioner Adam Silver as a way to change the format of the NBA's 82-game season.

If it even keeps an 82-game season.

Silver mentioned everything from shorter games to a shorter season Friday as ways the NBA could make its future product better for players and fans.

"The format we have in place now — I'm a traditionalist on one hand, but on the other hand it's 50 years old or so, presenting an 82-game season, and there's nothing magical about it," Silver said.

"I think it's on the league office to always be challenging the way we do things, to be paying attention to changing viewer habits, a changing marketplace, a new world of the way media is presented, often on smaller devices, less on screens, people having shorter attention spans, and saying, 'This is an incredible game, it's never been more exciting, the athleticism has never been greater, fantastic players coming from all around the world, but what's the best way to put the season together?'"

Silver has focused on player health as commissioner, opening the regular season earlier to reduce the

frequency of back-to-back games, and lengthening the All-Star break.

But players are still sitting out games throughout the season — either by their choice or because their teams are requiring it — often for reasons being listed as load management.

"I think a fair point from fans could be if ultimately the science suggests that 82 games is too many games for these players, maybe you shouldn't have an 82-game season," Silver said. "I accept that, and that's something we'll continue to look at."

Fewer games could mean less revenue, unless they could be replaced by something that would generate as many or more viewers. Tournaments could be an answer, even if 82 games remains the format.

Silver has pointed to European soccer as something that could bring new interest to the NBA by offering teams more opportunities to win something, instead of just having one champion.

"That's why I'm particularly interested in looking at different kinds of formats — at midseason tournaments, for example, play-in tournaments — because even accepting that players have so many miles on their bodies, there may be better ways to present it," Silver said. "Assuming guys are going to play 82 games, maybe there should be a certain number of games in the regular season and then there should be two tournaments throughout the season."



AP Photo/Charlie Litchfield

In this Tuesday, Dec. 18, 2018, file photo, Oregon guard Sabrina Ionescu (20) reacts during an NCAA college basketball game against Mississippi State in Eugene.

Williamson, Ionescu win honors at College Basketball Awards

By BETH HARRIS
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Zion Williamson of Duke insisted he doesn't know if he's going to declare for the NBA draft and leave Duke early.

Then his words seemingly betrayed him.

After winning the John R. Wooden Award as the nation's outstanding men's player at the College Basketball Awards Friday night, he rattled off memories from his freshman year.

"Just being around each other on and off the court because it was more than basketball," Williamson said during the nationally televised show. "The brotherhood is something real. The bond we had built is second to none so I know I'm going to miss that."

Oops.

Asked for the second time on the show if he was leaving early, he replied, "Like I said before, I don't know."

Williamson is the sixth player from Duke to win the award named for the late UCLA coach, who won a record 10 NCAA championships.

Williamson's trophy cabinet is already overstuffed. He has collected numerous awards — including The

Associated Press player of the year — for his efforts in leading the Blue Devils to the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament. They lost 68-67 to Michigan State, denying themselves a trip to the Final Four.

Earlier, Williamson won the Karl Malone power forward trophy.

"I don't regret nothing about this season," he said. "I enjoyed every moment of it."

Sabrina Ionescu of Oregon was a surprise winner of the women's Wooden Award. She and Williamson shared the spotlight during the fifth annual ceremony at The Novo in downtown Los Angeles.

Her mouth dropped open when her name was announced. The NCAA Division I leader in career triple-doubles with 18, she led the Ducks on their first-ever Final Four run. The 21-year-old point guard plans to return for her senior year.

"This award isn't won alone, so this goes out to my team, my family, my coaches, and everyone that made this possible," Ionescu said. "Growing up with two brothers, it wasn't easy. They never took it easy on me. We fought all the time. We played in the yard, and so this goes to them. They pushed me to my limits all the time."



AP Photo/Jeff Roberson

St. Louis Cardinals' Harrison Bader (48) celebrates with teammates Tyler O'Neill, left, and Jose Martinez following an 11-7 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers in a baseball game on Thursday in St. Louis.

With a presidential pitch, baseball gets a boost in Mexico

By CARLOS
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Associated Press

MONTERREY, Mexico — The St. Louis Cardinals, Cincinnati Reds and all of Major League Baseball will have one big fan rooting for them when they come together this weekend at Estadio de Béisbol de Monterrey — Mexican President Andres Manuel López Obrador.

López Obrador, who took the oath of office last December, is a devoted baseball fan and is trying hard to help the sport succeed in a country where soccer is still king.

The Cardinals and Reds meet for games on Saturday and Sunday, and the Houston Astros and Los Angeles Angels will play another two-game series at the same ballpark in early May.

But López Obrador wants baseball to be more than just a couple of big league sets every year.

"It's well known that baseball is my favorite sport, since I was a kid in my town there was nothing more than baseball," said the 65-year-old López Obrador, who has several videos on YouTube where he shows off a good swing. "I can still play, I can still hit above .300, I played center field when I was younger



AP Photo/John Minchillo

Cincinnati Reds right fielder Yasiel Puig (66) sits with his teammates in the dugout in the second inning of a baseball game against the Miami Marlins on Thursday in Cincinnati.

and had a good arm and covered a lot of ground."

MLB began holding regular season games in Mexico in 1996 when the San Diego Padres and Mets played three times. The 1999 season opened with a matchup in Monterrey between the Padres and Colorado. Last May, the Padres and Los Angeles Dodgers played a three-game series at the stadium — Walker Buehler and the Dodgers bullpen combined for a no-hitter.

All of those series were a success with sellouts in Monterrey.

López Obrador put some action behind his passion and recently created Promobeis, a government office run by Édgar González, a former player who spent

a couple of seasons as a Padres second baseman and was Mexico's manager at the World Baseball Classic.

Among other things, Promobeis has a goal to have between 60 and 80 Mexican players in the majors. This season, only eight local players started the season on big league rosters, but González — brother of former All-Star Adrian González — believes that he can have success because there are over 160 Mexicans in the minors.

"I love the challenge, it's something that has never been done before and can be a success. I think it's easier to have more Mexican baseball players in the big leagues than players in the NFL. Besides, we believe

that we can help to take kids away from the bad habits," González told The Associated Press.

"We believe that having more players in the majors will help us to grow the sport's popularity. Right now we have a little bit over 160 players in the minors, in the majors right now there are 10 because some of them are constantly being called up or sent down. It's a good number and I believe we can grow in the future and have more players signing with MLB clubs like the Puerto Ricans or the Dominicans," González said.

To put the program in motion, González and Promobeis have a \$17.5 million budget for 2019. The money will be invested in the opening of 10 baseball academies that are going to be administered by the government.

"It's going to be great if they support baseball like the president wants. You need to start early in the sport to be successful," said former big league slugger Vinny Castilla, considered one of the all-time great Mexican players. "Baseball is our president's great passion and that's big news because for all of us that love the sport, he is going to support the sport as much as he can."

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