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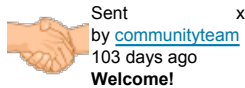
Sports Stack

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NFL Wants More Games -- At What Cost?

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Written by [kylestack](#) on 10/24/2010 8:32:58 PM

The NFL is on record with its acknowledgment that player safety on the field is of the utmost importance. The sense of protection comes after last weekend, when offensive players around the league were literally knocked out of games by helmet-leading hits from defensive players. Now, the league will fine players for aiming for the head or leading with the helmet when making a tackle. All in an effort to decrease the risk of injury. Yet the league and its owners still clamor for a two-game extension to the 16-game regular season. That'll just produce more of the hits they're trying to prevent.

The NFL's insistence on extending the regular season stems from an obvious dangling carrot: more money. More regular season games translates into more money from the TV networks, more fans buying tickets to games, more parking fees, more concession stand purchases...you get the picture.

The problem for players is that an extended season carries more injury risk. And that's before the tenacious playoff season begins for 12 teams. While the players might be tempted by the extra dough that comes with a longer season (their share of NFL revenue would increase with more games), the increased injury risk may not be worth it in the long run. How much of a price can they put on their health?

There isn't much reliable statistical evidence that players hit harder or injure each other more now than they did 10 or 20 years ago. (Many injuries can still go unreported from player-to-team or team-to-media.) However, watching a few games every Sunday gives any fan an unmistakable sense that the sport is more violent than ever. Players like to say the game is physical, not violent. A connotation with violence might make them feel too barbaric, so they avoid that adjective.

One facet of the game is certain: Faster, stronger players colliding into each other at maximum impact will create more long-term health risks for the players. I'm never sure if the NFL's efforts to curb on-field injuries derives from a genuine concern for its players' health, or whether it's a facade meant to impress the league's fans. Their latest effort is to fine defensive players for aiming for the head or leading with the helmet when making a tackle.

I would think that if the league is really concerned about the health risks all these violent hits carry, then it would look at shortening the season. Fewer games means less exposure to injuries. Unfortunately, that's not how the business works. The NFL has to toe a line between making money and protecting its most valuable employees. Hopefully, the latter comes out ahead of the former.

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