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Saturday, February 19th, 2011 at 2:18 pm | 14 responses

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## Improving NBA All-Star Saturday Night

NBA experts offer modifications to the dunk contest, three-point shootout and other events.

by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

Everybody has an idea of how NBA All-Star Weekend can improve. Pay players to take part in the dunk contest in order to have the top names participate. Create a half-court shooting contest or think of a way to make H-O-R-S-E a must-see event. Some folks probably think some sort of weather oracle should be consulted to avoid a snow- or rain-soaked weekend, which the NBA has battled the last two years in Dallas and Los Angeles, respectively. The point is that people enjoy the NBA just enough to care about ways to improve the weekend.

I had this thought in mind when I asked folks how to upgrade the appeal of All-Star Saturday Night. Friday and Sunday certainly have room to improve, but Saturday night is supposed to be the showcase. That's the night of the three-point shootout and the dunk contest — the events that we remember used to be great. It's Michael Jordan slashing through the air wearing a gold chain, Dominique Wilkins looking determined to shatter the backboard and Larry Bird asking who's going to finish second. These are moments etched into our NBA memory.

Saturday night can still be great, but the right mix of events and intriguing players has to be found. Questions have to be answered. How should the events be tweaked? And what can the NBA do to present more starpower throughout the night, namely in the dunk contest?

### Incentivize the dunk contest

"I think the League should be able to force players into the dunk contest," said Colin Cowherd, host of ESPN Radio's The Herd With Colin Cowherd and co-host of the ESPN TV show SportsNation. "If I sign a contract with ESPN, they say, 'Okay, you got to do a couple things here.' I feel the same way with the NBA — if you join the League you should have to be in the dunk contest the



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first couple years.”

The NBA holds an unofficial rule that contestants be in their first few years in the League, although a certain eighth-year player who took his talents to South Beach would be welcomed with open arms. [LeBron James](#) has flirted with participating in the dunk contest for years only to back out every time.

“The problem with the dunk contest is it’s sort of below the standard of the elite guy,” Cowherd explained. “[Kobe’s](#) beyond that. I’d love to see LeBron in it this year, but I don’t know if the NBA can figure out a way in collective bargaining to make certain guys have to fulfill certain things. I think that’s one way to do it.”

Representatives for the NBA Player’s Association couldn’t be reached for comment for this story, but it’s safe to say the NBAPA would fight any proposal in a collective bargaining agreement that required players to commit to certain events.

A large cash incentive has been cited as the carrot that can be dangled in front of star players to participate in the dunk contest. Last year’s winner, [Nate Robinson](#), received \$35,000 — roughly \$9,000 less than what James’ \$14.5 million salary earns him per quarter.

“I’d say it’s a money thing,” said [Cedric Ceballos](#), who played 11 seasons in the NBA and is famous for winning the 1992 Slam Dunk Contest with a [blindfolded dunk](#). “It’s the just the risk that’s involved. You need to ante it up if you want to get the big-time dunkers to come in and take a chance on possibly getting hurt, for the price they’re doing it.”

Phoenix’s [Hakim Warrick](#) was succinct when asked why star players won’t commit to the contest. “Guys just don’t want to do it,” Warrick said. He added that the older a player gets, the tougher it is to warm up for the contest. It’s easier for the younger guys to try it, he said, with “younger guys” presumably being from the 25-and-under crowd.

Ceballos raised a point shared by many others who spoke for this story. But not everybody was in agreement that a larger pot of cash was the way to go.

[Darren Rovell](#), the sports business reporter for CNBC, was skeptical of cash being the only method to heighten interest in the dunk contest.

“It’s going to be difficult,” Rovell said. “It has to be the right sponsor, and it can’t be a conflicting sponsor with the big guys. We had [Dwight Howard](#) for two years, the Nate Robinson-Dwight Howard thing...that’s almost to me the best it can get. I’m not sure a sponsor is sure they can get their return-on-investment.”

Rovell stated the NBA’s great problem with the contest is that there are so many impressive in-game dunks during the regular season that dunk contest participants feel they have to live up to an unrealistic standard. That is, they have to show fans a dunk they haven’t seen. The human body can do only so much. We haven’t seen anybody stretch the free throw dunk into a three-point slam. Nobody can jump from the court and land his feet on the rim. (Not even [Blake Griffin](#), you Blake Show bandwagoners.)

If fans have a problem with players earning more money for a dunk contest, then at least make it so that all money is directed to charity. That was the thought of [Michelle Beadle](#), co-host with Cowherd on ESPN’s SportsNation.

“I don’t want to give these guys any more money because it’s out of hand as is [Laughs],” Beadle said. “These guys have enough money, so I don’t think they care about anything like that. I just don’t want to see [Serge Ibaka](#) in the dunk contest every year for the rest of my life — or guys of his ilk [Laughs].”

Beadle offered that players could dictate which charity would receive their winnings. She also scoffed at the notion that players’ bodies take a toll by performing in the dunk contest. “Going out ‘til 4 a.m. probably wrecks more havoc on the body than a dunk [Laughs],” Beadle said.

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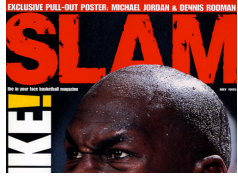
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## 14 Responses to "Improving NBA All-Star Saturday Night"

TheMac Posted: Feb.19 at 6:17 pm

Needs some work indeed! Good ideas!

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will Posted: Feb.19 at 6:21 pm

some ok ideas but that dunk showdown yesterday was weak. the whole point of horse is to take trick shots but every year they just take jumpers

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paul Posted: Feb.19 at 6:28 pm

Listen, the dunks are boring. The problem isn't that "the human body can only do so much". The problem is that players aren't putting much creativity into it. So here's how to fix it. 1) choose excellent judges, not necessarily celebrities, but people who actually are going to be a little bit demanding, 2) provide a sizable prize, say, 100,000\$, and nice runner-up prizes for ALL contestants, 3) make contestants apply for the contest, submitting videos, and open it up to people who are not NBA players. In other words, make it more creative and more fun. There are only so many times you can watch someone who can nearly reach the basket standing flatfooted, and who can jump three feet on top of that, tomahawk the ball into the hoop and get excited over it. We forget that when a big dunk happens in a game, there is CONTEXT. When 6' 1" Rajon Rondo authoritatively posterizes 6' 11" Chris Bosch, in a showdown game where the Celtics are handling the Heat, it's loaded with meaning. So design the dunk contest in a way that allows it to have its own meaning.

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[BossTerry](#) Posted: Feb.19 at 6:33 pm

Thinks the WNBA should have a lay-up contest.

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[Allenp](#) Posted: Feb.19 at 6:45 pm

This fantasy draft is crazy.

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[what](#) Posted: Feb.19 at 9:19 pm

Colin Cowherd is awful.

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[Ugh](#) Posted: Feb.20 at 4:12 am

Nash admitted before the Three-Point Shootout that the only reason he was taking part in the event was because the Collective Bargaining Agreement says he has to. (Said Nash: "They hold me to it every year.") So naturally he went out and performed like a man who didn't care and wanted it to all be over as quickly as possible, hitting only eight of 25 shots and scoring a lowly nine points. Maybe that'll teach David Stern not to force unwilling former MVPs to compete in meaningless contests they couldn't care less about."

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[Ugh](#) Posted: Feb.20 at 4:13 am

Quote there from Basketbawful at the '08 ASG.

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JTaylor21 Posted: Feb.20 at 10:39 am

I love how people always complain about the dunks being weak, like they can even touch the net jumping off a trampoline. Stop b\*tching and realize that almost every dunk possible by a human being has damn near been done before.

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[Boy Sanchez](#) Posted: Feb.20 at 11:04 am

What about a 1-on-1 contest...? Think about it. Let's say... 16 players of all positions (SF, PF, C, SG and PG). Their names get all together in a ballot and random pairs are picked up. So we have 8 pairs and let the tournament begin! One game, 5 minutes (or the winner is the first to reach 11 points), the winner advances to the next round and the loser stays to watch the show. Think about it. Derrick Rose VS Dwight Howard. Josh Smith VS Al Horford. Joe Johnson VS Pau Gasol. Rajon Rondo VS Amar'e Stoudamire. The list can go on....

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[That Dude](#) Posted: Feb.20 at 5:28 pm

I think keeping it simple and oriented around the players is the way to go – good idea to have more contestants, only one failed attempt, lay up line, let the players vote for who they want to see and then show scores only at the end of each round. When it takes 20 minutes to set up one dunk people expect something ridiculous.

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[That Dude](#) Posted: Feb.20 at 5:31 pm

Bottom line, the dunk contest depends on the dunks. Just like the all-star game, sometimes its a dud, sometimes its incredible. thats why we watch sports. Can't expect it to be mindblowing every year.

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Young C Posted: Feb.21 at 9:48 am

How about next year we have TFB v the NBA's best dunkers?

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[Ugh](#) Posted: Feb.21 at 10:17 am

Because no NBA players would make it out of the first round and the NBA would have no interest in that. End of discussion.

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