

GUEST COLUMN / WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

Mitch Henck: Start Basketball a Month Later

November 22, 2015

"I have two tickets three rows from the floor," shouted an aging Badgers basketball fan Tuesday night at Wando's Bar & Grill in Madison before the game. I already had my two tickets in the chairs on the second tier, but I bought his for \$13 under face value.

"I'll just sell mine," I told a guest, "And we'll sit down low."

I scalped tickets as a youth in Indiana, and the rule was you can always sell a pair of tickets anywhere and never eat a single ticket. Most people don't go to games by themselves. But Indiana basketball, like at Kentucky, Kansas, and North Carolina, have people on the waiting list for decades to get season tickets. Those are states where basketball comes first.

That reality hit me in the rain Tuesday night as I stood outside the Kohl Center unable to sell my two tickets. Even the regular scalpers failed to sell floor level seats. "I'm going to take a bath on my tickets," I told one of the scalpers. "Not like us," he lamented.

Two Final Four appearances in a row hasn't changed the fact Wisconsin is very much a football-first state. The winning is too new. In all the years at the UW Fieldhouse, the Badgers never sold out for a whole season. The sellouts started under Bo Ryan in the early 2000s, at the Kohl Center.

It took decades and multiple national championships in those other states to build the kind of basketball culture that would have sold those tickets in the rain.

But it's not a fair fight. In the basketball-first states, which includes Connecticut, football is almost always horrible. And it's hard for the football-first schools to catch up in basketball when college and pro football rage on for three months after basketball starts. Even during March Madness, sports networks do lengthy shows on the NFL draft.

The solution is to start basketball a month later. Yes, it could start after the college football conference title games. That gives basketball two weeks in the spotlight before the minor bowl games start, and players would still have time to study for finals. The first full month of the non-conference basketball season would then be played in January after the college football playoffs.

The conference basketball games would be played in February and March, and the tournament would become April Madness. Baseball's opening days would not have to compete with the Thursday and Friday NCAA tournament rounds, and the Masters is only a minor distraction.

The NCAA Final Four would be in early May. The NBA playoffs would only be two weeks old when almost nobody cares. What would you rather do basketball people, compete with baseball or football? No more questions, your honor.

Yes, I'm a guy from a basketball state whose alma mater, Butler, plays in the second oldest gym in the country. But I care deeply about the game, and I'm tired of playing a distant second to football for three months during basketball season.

OK, athletic directors and college presidents, you can make this happen without even working up a sweat.

*Mitch is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic.
The Mitch Henck show is broadcast live 8-11a.m. Monday-Friday at www.mitchhenck.com
mitch@mitchhenck.com*