

Implementing Rule Changes in Your Fantasy League

Written by Glen Hoos

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*For the Good of the Game:
Implementing Rule Changes in Your Fantasy League*

Back in the day (and I mean *way* back in the day, twenty years before I was born), a minor penalty resulted in a full two-minute powerplay, regardless of how many goals were scored with the man advantage.

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On November 5, 1955, Jean Beliveau of the Montreal Canadiens scored the fastest hat trick in history, bagging three goals in 44 seconds – all on the same powerplay. This proved to be the spark that led to the rule being changed to what we're familiar with today: when a powerplay goal is scored, the powerplay ends (for a minor penalty, anyway).

The change was dictated by owners of opposing teams who were tired of seeing the mighty Habs offence, led by Beliveau, Rocket Richard, Boom Boom Geoffrion and Doug Harvey, routinely put games away in the span of two minutes. Hey, if you can't beat 'em... change the rules.

Which leads me to one of my biggest fantasy hockey pet peeves: random rule changes made out of self-interest, instead of the good of the league.

Back in the day (and this time I mean *not quite as far* back in the day, maybe early 90's), I was getting my feet wet as a fantasy commissioner. In fact, come to think of it, I didn't even have the title; though I seemed to be the one organizing draft dates and tracking stats, we ran our league as a democracy. All league matters were put to a simple, majority-rules vote.

As a manager, this caused me no end of frustration. Year after year, I'd see the managers of the bottom half of the league band together and vote in some ludicrous rule change to make things more difficult for those of us who had bothered to do our homework and draft a good team.

The incident I remember most clearly came in the mid-90's, when we decided before the draft to make our league a limited keeper league for the first time. Somehow, I managed to draft Eric Lindros and Mario Lemieux that year, and rolled to the most dominant season I've ever had. Predictably, at season's end, just over half the owners (coincidentally, the ones who had finished lowest in the standings) conspired to overturn the keeper rule, for no other reason than that my team was too strong.

Fast forward to the present. When it comes to rule changes, I'm a firm believer that selfish interests should be set aside, and rules voting should be based on what's best for the league, improving competitive balance, and creating the most fun for the most people. In fact, over the past couple seasons, as my league voted on a number of statistical category changes, I

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purposely refrained from doing the math to see how the changes would impact my team. I wanted to vote as a steward of the game, not as a team owner, but I didn't trust myself to do so if I knew a rule change was going to hurt my chances. Like anyone else, I love to win.

For this reason, rule changes in my GFHL require approval by 75% of owners, instead of the traditional majority (in our case, we've rounded it to 10 of the 14 owners). This helps ensure that rules are changed for the right reasons – a rule won't change if it only has the support of the weaker teams or the stronger teams.

During the Stanley Cup playoffs, I send out an invitation to all managers to submit any rule changes that they would like to see implemented. Nothing gets vetoed at this stage; if someone wants a vote, we have a vote. Sometimes there is some pre-voting discussion; sometimes not. The owner who proposed the change is entitled to write a brief rationale for why they think the change would be beneficial, which I post along with proposal when I put it to an online vote in our message board. Voting happens during the Stanley Cup Final, so that next year's rules are set before our roster freeze ends, the night the Stanley Cup is presented. Everyone has a right to know the rules we're playing by when they set about reshaping their roster over the summer.

After five years, I can say that this system has worked very well for us. Typically, we vote on 4-6 rule changes each year, and one or two of them pass. Some failed proposals die out at that point, and others are trotted out again the next year in hopes that the second time's a charm (it took two tries to add blocked shots and to approve expansion, but both were eventually embraced). I think our rules have improved every year; the successful proposals have been for the good of the game, and there have been no controversies to speak of. And we all know that nothing makes a commissioner happier than a league at peace. Right, Gary?

How does your fantasy league handle rule changes?