

NCAA Hoopsopoly

By Reg P. Wydeven
August 27, 2005

Growing up, my favorite board game was definitely Monopoly. I always used the dog game piece, and my strategy was to buy up every piece of real estate I landed on, including the crummy purple ones. I love the marathon-esque time it takes to play one game, plus Monopoly gave me my only realistic chance of taking 2nd prize in a beauty contest.

I frequented McDonald's when they introduced the Monopoly promotion, and I even won a few Big Macs and orders of fries. All four times I've gone to a casino, I've played the Monopoly slot machine, where I once won over \$300.

Even though I have a fondness for Monopoly, in general, monopolies are bad things. Legally, a monopoly occurs when one company exclusively controls goods, a service or a means of production. A frequent result of a monopoly is price fixing, where a company inflates their prices because what they're selling can't be obtained anywhere else - much like the gas stations in remote parts of northern California that are selling gasoline for over \$4 a gallon.

Monopolies are so bad, in fact, there are several federal and state laws in place to prevent them. Commonly called antitrust acts, laws such as the Sherman Act, Clayton Act and Federal Trade Commission Act, were passed to protect trade and commerce from unlawful restraints, price discriminations, price fixing and monopolies.

It was under these laws that the National Invitational Tournament sued the NCAA for attempting to monopolize men's postseason basketball. Starting in 1938, the NIT has a 16-team preseason and a 40-team postseason tournament. These tournaments used to be the premier men's collegiate basketball contests. A year later the NCAA Tournament was formed, however, and quickly overshadowed its predecessor, so much so that it is now known as 'The Big Dance'.

The NIT filed suit against the NCAA because of a rule that mandates if a team is selected for the NCAA Tournament, it must play in that event rather than go to the NIT. The NCAA resolved this case with an ironic twist - the monopoly-prevention lawsuit went away last week when the NCAA bought the NIT.

The NCAA announced it purchased the preseason and postseason NIT for \$40.5 million during a news conference held at Madison Square Garden, the site of both the pre- and postseason NIT semifinals and finals. Before the sale could go through, both MSG and the ESPN network, as contractual partners with the NIT, had to agree to assign their contracts to the NCAA, which they both did. Because of the NIT's storied history with New York, NCAA officials also announced that MSG would remain as the tournament site for at least the next five years.

By owning both tournaments, hoop fans hope the NCAA will revoke the "2-in-4" rule that limits teams to play in two exempted events, like the preseason NIT or the EA Sports Maui Invitational, in a four-year period. Eliminating this rule will allow more higher-profile teams to play in these events on a regular basis, such as Duke and UCLA, which will both be playing in this year's preseason NIT.

The NCAA will also ensure that the postseason tournaments will not be held on the same do to avoid television conflicts.

So again, even though monopolies are bad, as a huge basketball fan, the NCAA's monopoly seems to be in my favor - especially if they honor my wish by combining both postseason tournaments into a 104-team hoops extravaganza! Talk about March Madness!

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