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English 101, 8:30
August 8, 2007
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A Brutal but Fair Game

When overtime occurs in professional football, each team should have an equal opportunity to score in order to come away with the win. Let's assume that both teams have fought for the win in regulation, but have managed to tie. Currently the NFL has an overtime situation that favors the winner of a coin toss. Josh Elliott, a writer for Sports Illustrated.com describes that "58 percent of overtime games end after the toss-winner's initial possession" (Elliott par 4). The main problem with this policy is not that the team who won the coin toss won the game, but that the more than 50% of the games won in overtime end after the first possession.

It seems that more often than not the decision of which team wins the game in overtime is determined by the luck of a coin toss rather than skill of the athletes competing. Luck should not be the main reason why a team wins a game. The skill of the athletes and their hard work should decide who wins the game. The NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, along with the rules committee, should change the current NFL overtime rules to resemble the overtime rules in college football. The current overtime policy in college allows both teams at least one offensive possession to try to score. The overtime period(s) will continue until one team cannot tie or come away with the win. This change to the current NFL overtime rules should be addressed and put into effect within the next two seasons.

The current overtime rules in college football has a similarity to overtime in the NFL since that both start off with a coin flip. The importance of college football overtime rules doesn't rest in the similarities, but in the differences between the two. In college football, the team who wins the coin flip can elect to receive the ball first and try to score either by a touchdown or a field goal. Or the team can choose to be on defense first, and allow the opposing team a chance to score. This option has its advantages as well. Letting the opposing team score first lets the other team know exactly whether

they need to score a field goal or a touchdown in order to win. There is more strategy involved in college football overtime compared to in the NFL. The strategy of figuring out the best way to score is part of the reason why overtime is so exciting.

According to Christian Swezey, a writer for The Washington Post: in college football “each team begins possession on its opponent’s 25-yard line” (Swezey par2). Starting the possession on the opponent’s 25-yard line adds a certain excitement to the game. The offense is just close enough to be knocking on the door of the end zone, but just far enough away that scoring is not a given. This excitement of overtime was exemplified in this years’ Tostitos FIESTA BOWL between Boise State and Oklahoma. Rod Gilmore, a writer for ESPN.com describes how Chris Peterson, the coach of Boise State pulled off a miraculous win in overtime. Gilmore states that “Down 42-35 in OT and he calls a fourth-down halfback option pass that goes for a TD. After that, he goes for the win, hitting a two-point conversion on a Statue of Liberty play with Ian Johnson taking it in for the win” (Gilmore par 1). This is exactly how overtime should be played out. Each team gets an offensive possession which makes it fair, as well as adding excitement to game.

The current NFL overtime starts with a coin toss. The winner of the coin toss will elect to either receive the ball first or kick the ball to the opposing team. Usually the team who wins the coin toss will elect to receive the ball first. That team’s offense will then take the field and begin their drive. Baring any interceptions, fumbles, or lack of progress, that team will march down the field and score and then the game is over. This current system doesn’t allow the opposing team the opportunity to score. The team that was on defense on the first possession should be allowed an opportunity on offense to either tie the game or go for the win. If neither team can manage to score on their first offensive possession, then a second overtime will be played until a team scores and the opposing team cannot answer. In countless games, a team will work hard just to tie the game, only to have their opportunity to score cut short in the first possession of overtime by a player whose only job is to kick field goals.

With the talented kickers in the NFL teams possess, the offense would only have to reach the 40 yard line on their opponent's side of the field to be within field goal range. But most teams would prefer to get closer than that to improve their kicker's odds of making the field goal. Reaching their opponent's 40 yard line would set up a 50 yard field goal because of the goal posts being set up 10 yards back from the goal line.

Currently the kickers in the NFL are talented and strong enough to make field goals between 40 and 50 yards. There have been a few kickers in the past that have successfully kicked 60 yard field goals. They are paid enough that their coaches expect that type of performance out of them on a consistent basis. College football teams not only rely on their kickers on a consistent basis to score in overtime but also rely on touchdowns as well.

Using the current college overtime rules as well as state-of-the-art broadcasting cameras will bring a whole new excite to Monday Night Football. According to Richard O. Davies, the author of the article "Pro Football and the Rise of Sports Television", the cameras used would be able capture the "graphic pictures of the violence on the line of scrimmage" (Davies pg 44).

Even with all this, there are going to be those people who are going to be opposed to changing the current NFL overtime. According to NFL.com, the current NFL overtime rules have been in place since 1974 (NFL.com). Many people opposing the change might bring up that since the rules have been in place for over 30 years, they must be working. In response to that statement, the policy has been in place for that long because a legitimate alternative has not been agreed upon. The alternative is the college football overtime policy. The college rules adds fairness to the game, as well as excitement that is currently lacking in NFL overtime.

There might be some opposition towards the changing of NFL overtime rules because overtime games might interfere with other programs. A similar situation occurred in 1968, between the Oakland Raiders and the New York Jets. Although the game ran longer than expected, it was not because of overtime. Penalties were the reason the game ran long. Even though overtime wasn't the reason, the

game still had an affect on programs that were scheduled around the time of the game. According to David Elfin, a writer for The Washington Times, the controversial game went as followed:

The “Heidi game is unforgettable because no one saw that wild finish except fro the 53,118 on hand at Oakland Coliseum. With Lamonica and Jets quarterback Joe Namath filling the air with passes, the game ran long. NBC, which had a lucrative contract with Timex to sponsor the movie “Heidi” promptly at 7 p.m. Eastern time, switched from the game just after Turner’s tie-breaking field goal. (Elfin par 7)

The response to this opposition is simple. Don’t schedule any TV programs around football games that can’t be either rescheduled or played later. In resolving the current NFL overtime problem, the only possible compromise would be to give the NFL teams two seasons to get use to having a new format. After the two season are up the new rules would be officially put in place.

Word Count 1,346

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