



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

Midnight basketball The ABC's of sports

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Thanks to the revenue-guided decision-making by network executives at ABC, there is another meaning to the term midnight basketball than just a controversial crime prevention strategy of the 1990s. With tonight's Celtics-Lakers tip-off scheduled for sometime after 9 pm Eastern Time, the thrilling conclusion may not come until the clock strikes 12:00 here in Boston.

The midnight hour isn't too much of a problem for us grown-ups who can show up a bit late for work in the morning and blame it on the traffic. But a significant and important share of the Celtics fan-base those too young to purchase the beer promoted during the long commercial breaks in the action may not be able to burn some midnight oil.

Sure, kids can always record the game and watch the second half in the morning (the NBA on ABC on DVR in the AM). But any true fan knows that it's just not the same excitement when the final score can be had just by pressing the fast-forward button on the remote.

Obviously, the three-hour time differential between the East and West Coasts is an easy excuse for ignoring the interests of young fans. It would be unfair to start the game any earlier for those Lakers' followers who are unable to duck out of work early (or movie stars who can't leave the film set a bit sooner). But the LA factor doesn't explain why the games against Orlando started after 8:30 at night. And the time zone dilemma doesn't explain why the Sunday afternoon at 3:30 schedule those early [Larry] Bird specials went out along with analog TV.

The NBA is not alone, of course, in ignoring its younger fans. Major league baseball is absolutely America's pastime as the October post-season games last well past the time when the younger citizens of Red Sox Nation must (unwillingly) go to bed. And, the NHL isn't apparently too concerned about its many overtime games extending so late that they end on a different day than they begin. NHL executives are just happy to have major television exposure, no matter what time of day.

Out of legitimate concern for the well-being of children, we constantly complain about the nature of entertainment content television and film options that turn killing into a spectator sport, and video games that transform it from spectator to participant. Moreover, these violent media are available to children virtually at any time of day or night. Professional sports other than the unnecessary roughness at times and the occasional tantrums of childish athletes can still be a viable and healthier alternative form of entertainment. Maybe it's time for sports executives to think more about tomorrow's consumers.

But who am I to complain? I've got dinner plans tonight at 7:30 pm, yet I can still be home with beer in hand just in time for tip-off. Go Celts!