

Gregory's Sport Gossip

Putting the Snap Into Basketball; Apologies to Mr. Houston; Shrine Game Wow

BY L. H. GREGORY.

HOW long will basketball continue to put the stress on negative rather than on positive endeavor? By that I mean how long will it be quite the regular thing for teams to win important games, even championships, on penalties rather than on offensive excellence? The outstanding present characteristic of varsity basketball certainly is its glorification of the free throw.

Consider the game in Seattle Saturday night, in which the University of Washington defeated Idaho, 31-25, thereby taking the lead in the northern division's championship race. I don't dispute that Washington probably had the better team, and would have won on merit, though it was very close. Washington made 12 field baskets to 11 for Idaho, and right there is a two-point winning margin on offensive strength.

But it was on free throws from fouls, not on baskets from the field, that Washington piled up its lead. Seventeen fouls—just count 'em!—were called on Idaho, every one of the 17 giving at least one free toss to Washington, and of these free tosses the Huskies caged nine. Of seven fouls charged against Washington, Idaho shot one.

If that is not a glorification of the free throw, a deification of penalty as against fire superiority in competition, will you kindly name it? Even had Idaho made the 12 field baskets and Washington only the 11, this free-throw emphasis would still have made it impossible for Idaho to win.

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At this juncture someone, of course, will say, disgustedly: "But Idaho evidently violated the rules 17 times, consequently should have been penalized. What do you want to do—encourage rule violation and make the game a slaughter house, with no protection for clean play?"

Not by a full jugful of the best repeal stuff. That's not the argument at all. If the rules are violated—we are not now discussing the extreme technicalization of so many of them—go ahead and call the violation. My point is that in giving a free shot as the penalty on every such infraction, minor as well as major, the basketball rules have just about managed to negativize the game.

They make basketball penalty-top-heavy. They put the free shot on such a pedestal that it becomes too much the determining factor of any close game.