

Lock Up the Coaches (make football fun again)

By Jon Ericson

Co-Founder and First President, The Drake Group

Pay college football players? Want a better idea: give them back their game. Game time: lock up the coaches, and let college kids be college kids.

Yes, at game time, all coaches will be locked in a room providing 2 or 4 or 6 TV screens to monitor the game. iPad Notes permitted, but no outside communication. At halftime, coaches can join the team, and at second-half kickoff, back in the room they go. Imagine, no more ubiquitous TV shots of coaches: no tantrums by adults, no awaiting coach's head to explode. Keep the camera on the players. The players, the players. . . .

What's not to like about that?

Coaches will say they can't have their careers hang on the decisions of 18-year-olds. First, most of the players—at least the leaders—are not 18. They are 20, 21 or 22, old enough to lead a platoon into combat. No matter, locking up the coaches will actually determine who can coach. Think tennis.

With the coaches locked up, the game will be returned to the players, and the best coaching will be on display. Preparation, preparation, preparation. Drill, drill, drill. Watching film. Endlessly. Teach, teach, teach. It is what coaches say they do. Saturday is the examination, and everyone knows the teacher cannot tell the student how to answer the questions.

The quarterback knows which lineman is beating his man. He knows when the play he has called is heading for trouble; he knows how to check off to a better play. [Or damn well should.] So let him do it. Which quarterback does the better job? The one who had the better teacher, er, coach. The middle linebacker has reviewed every formation of the opponent, knows every defensive alignment. When the off-tackle run is killing the defense, he will change alignment to stop it. That is what he is taught to do.

I was the quarterback for four years for the Laurel, Nebraska Bears. Plus one year for the Doane College Tigers. As a football player, I could do it all except run, block, and tackle. But I could see when the play I called was the wrong play, and I would check off to counter what the defense was doing. "66" was the quarterback sneak; "88" was the quick down and out pass to left end Tuttle. Isn't that charming you say, but the game is much more complicated than

in the leather-helmet days. Well, I could have handled “22,” “33,” and “44” too. Doesn’t matter; so is the preparation. More, it doesn’t matter because both teams play by the same rules. And isn’t that the idea of sports?

College football should mean the game is for the players. Stop considering them as hired hands, and stop using them as pawns.