

Should court storming by fans in college basketball be banned?

By Sheldon H. Jacobson

When Wake Forest University's Demon Deacons defeated Duke University's Blue Devils on Saturday, Wake Forest students stormed the court, celebrating their team's victory over a much-maligned in-state rival. Duke player Kyle Filipowski got injured during the exuberant on-court celebration and chaos, which prompted calls to end court storming, with an eye on protecting the players.

Before throwing the baby out with the bath water, so to speak, let's look at the issue dispassionately rather than with a visceral response.

Students are filled with energy and enthusiasm, and sports amplify such feelings. When their team takes down a highly ranked opponent or a bitterly hated conference rival, students want to celebrate. The natural reaction is to storm the court to celebrate the victory with the players.

Yet, anytime nonathletes enter the basketball court, risks emerge.

Students running across a court filled with players as the game ends is a formula for disaster. Unfortunately, Filipowski got caught in the frenzy. University of Iowa superstar Caitlin Clark faced a similar situation when Ohio State University upset University of Iowa in Columbus, Ohio, on Jan. 21.

No one wants any players to be injured in the aftermath of an upset victory. The greatest risks are to the visiting players after the home team wins. Notably, anyone caught in the court chaos is vulnerable to injury.



Wake Forest fans storm the court after a win Saturday over Duke at Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. **GRANT HALVERSON/GETTY**

We are able to make predictions, though. Anytime a highly ranked team plays on the road against a conference rival, the risk of students storming the court exists.

Should the practice be banned? Given the predictability, the more appropriate response would be to manage it.

To mitigate risk, the coach and players could make public announcements about responsible celebration for several days before the game. If the administration,

instead of issuing directives or threatening penalties, were to have the coach and the players call for restraint, students would be more likely to respond positively.

University of Connecticut, Purdue University, University of Houston and University of Tennessee, the top teams listed in recent Associated Press polls, are now at the most risk for court storming when playing on the road. Notably, even

major upsets in midmajor conferences can produce such responses.

UConn at Marquette University on March 6 and Purdue at University of Illinois on March 5 represent the highest potential of students storming the court if their team pulls the upset.

Other sensible proactive actions could be taken. When an upset is brewing and appears likely, the referees could call a timeout and alert each of the coaches of the emerging situation so they could prepare. Coaches could then remind the players of what may be coming. An escape plan should be discussed during practices so players on the court know exactly what to do to protect themselves and their teammates when the final buzzer sounds.

The good news is that players are rarely injured during court storming events. Players are far more likely to be injured during practice or game time than in the aftermath of an upset loss on the road.

Risks come with the territory for college athletes, during the game and in the aftermath of games. Administration officials could prohibit fans from storming the court, yet managing the risks of the practice is a more appropriate response.

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