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[Myles Brand](#), Contributor  
President of the NCAA

# Maybe Two Is More Than Twice as Good as One

You would think it is the end of civilization as we know it.

According to scores of media reports over the last two months, the NBA's rule that a young man must be out of high school a year and at least 19 years old to enter its draft — termed by most as the one-and-done rule — is the ruination of college basketball. Others decry it as a violation of some sacred right to professionalize oneself regardless of whether one is ready to do so or not.

Despite the dire warnings of the conspiracy theorists, this is the NBA rule; not the NCAA rule. It is the result of a collective bargaining agreement between the NBA and its players' association (otherwise the rule likely would be illegal). The NCAA neither had nor has any role to play in either the original creation or any future amendment of the rule.

Other than all the articles written, it has little impact on the college game.

“But wait,” shout the naysayers, “What about the fact that the rule guarantees there will be basketball players — student-athletes — who have no intention of being students and even stop going to classes their second semester? And what about the fact that some may cheat to become eligible for their required one year?”

The problem with the majority of the media reports is that they focus on the same two or three examples and fail to point out that the number of one-and-doners is no more than a handful in any one year.

To be honest, the one-and-done rule is not perfect. It creates a few examples of disingenuous matriculation on the part of young men who would rather have bypassed college to play basketball at a professional level. But for the life of me, I can't see that the rule has increased the number of such examples.

The overwhelming majority of male college basketball players who yearn for “the league” realize the college game will improve their chances of being successful as professional players. Most, but not all, will stay until they have their degree (although increasingly they return get it), but we don't find fault with musicians who leave early for “the pros” or entrepreneurs who forgo a degree for the fortunes of a new business enterprise.

I would prefer that all who enter college stay to earn a degree or return to do so. As an educator for more than 40 years, I'm convinced they will be happier, be more productive, and be better citizens if they do. But not all will... whether they are student-athletes or not.

And it should be noted that there are other opportunities for those elite few basketball standouts who just don't want to go to college. They can take the European route, or they can enter the NBA's developmental league. They should seriously consider those alternatives.

And as for the cheaters?

Well, they're cheaters. Do we really think the one-and-done rule made them that way?

Let's be clear on a few points:

- If I understand David Stern's unambiguous message, the rule is a business decision on the part of the NBA. It no longer wants to risk large bonuses on high school graduates who may or may not be pro ready. Sounds right.

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- The players association members may have seen that there is more salary to distribute to the proven talented if less is spent on unproven speculation.

- And even though the NCAA has no dog in this fight, I have been clear that I like the fact the rule reminds most high school boys that they can't just write off their education. The rule tends to keep the heads of a larger number of young basketball athletes in their books long enough at least to prepare them for a potential college opportunity.

What I would like even more is an NBA rule (Did I mention that only the NBA and its players association, not the NCAA, can amend the rule?) that requires two years out of high school before entering the draft. In my mind, it would improve the situation for the college game and enhance the business benefits for the NBA.

The marketability of the stars would be increased in that they would be better known before beginning their professional careers. They would also be further along in their physical and skill development. Good things for the NBA.

From the college perspective, there are clear advantages. Even if players leave after a year and a half, it is likely they would have attended two summer sessions (one before the start of their freshman year to address any deficiencies and one between their freshman and sophomore years). That's five semesters and a lot further down the road than the one-and-done allows.

It would also mean that high school basketball athletes would come to college much better prepared, and those who just don't want the college experience may more seriously consider other opportunities.

To be sure, a two-year rule will not resolve all the problems, even though it is an improvement. The recruiting environment will not change simply by moving to a 20-year-old age rule. To fix that, and related issues, the NCAA will need to strongly enhance its enforcement.

Third parties will still hang around programs, perhaps for longer periods of time. The trouble that such parties can get young athletes — and colleges and universities — into is not to be taken lightly. Enforcement, including at state and federal levels, is still the answer.

I have no idea how the next round of collective bargaining between the NBA and players' association will go. The age-limitation rule is in their hands. I'm not as opposed to the one-year rule as many others are. There are some disadvantages, but there are also some clear advantages.

A two-year limitation makes more sense to me. It does better what the one-year rule was intended to do from both the NBA and collegiate perspectives.

Of one thing I'm certain regardless of what those two parties do.

It will not mean the demise of civilization. But the pundits will likely tell you to get under shelter because the sky is falling.