

Pro Bowl before Super Bowl experiment questionable

By KARL YU
Epoch Times Staff

The NFL is considered by many as the top pro sports league in North America but it consistently falls short with the entertainment value of its version of All-Star Game, the Pro Bowl.

Unlike other All-Star games, the Pro Bowl doesn't take place at the midway point of the regular season. It normally takes place after the Super Bowl and a lot of the things that make the NFL exciting are nonexistent. For example, there is no blitzing among other things.

Baseball suffered similar problems with its All-Star Game and began awarding home-field advantage in the World Series to the winner of its Midsummer Classic and Commissioner Roger Goodell is trying to switch things up in the NFL as well.

The Pro Bowl won't be moved to the beginning of November, the NFL regular season's halfway mark.

Instead, it will be moved from Hawaii to Miami, site of this year's Super Bowl and will be played a week before the NFL's championship game.

"Moving the Pro Bowl to the Sunday prior to the Super Bowl can add even more excitement to Super Bowl week, one of the most anticipated weeks of the year," NFL Senior VP of Events Frank Supovitz told NFL.com when the change was announced about a year ago.

"Taking the Pro Bowl to new locations can showcase our top players to more fans around the country."

While moving the date of the game is a good idea, the two Super Bowl XLIV participants—New Orleans Saints and Indianapolis Colts—won't be taking part.

Can you imagine either Peyton



BIG CHANCE: Houston's Matt Schaub led the NFL in passing yardage this season and relishes the opportunity to be in Miami for the Pro Bowl.

STEPHEN DUNN/GETTY IMAGES

Manning or Drew Brees getting injured and missing the Super Bowl the week after?

That members of the Colts and Saints won't be partaking lessens the number of talented players in

this year's Pro Bowl. The fact that the NFL's All-Star game takes place a week after the conference championships also means less talent.

Minnesota Vikings QB Brett Favre, who was knocked around

by the Saints defense last Sunday, won't be taking part. He'll be replaced by Dallas Cowboys signal-caller Tony Romo and Philadelphia Eagles pivot Donovan McNabb will sub-in for New Orleans' Drew Brees

who will be busy dissecting the Colts defense in the video room.

New England Patriots QB Tom Brady also won't be taking part in the festivities in Miami.

"I don't have a lot of thoughts on

the Pro Bowl," Brady told ESPN.

"I'm not playing this year." But the loss of Brady is another player's gain.

Houston Texans QB Matt Schaub will be Brady's replacement and sensed that he might get the call as a Pro Bowl replacement.

The Houston Chronicle reports that Schaub didn't make plans for this week just in case.

"I was definitely thinking that it could happen," Schaub told the Chronicle.

"You've got to stay ready in this business."

Schaub, who led the league in passing yards, will join teammates Andre Johnson, Brian Cushing, Mario Williams, and DeMeco Ryans on the AFC Pro Bowl squad and unlike others who are dropping out, he's relishing the opportunity and happy for his teammates as well.

"I'm very excited about going down there [Miami]," he also told the Houston Chronicle.

"To have five guys from our team be a part of it, that says a lot about what we're doing in Houston."

While it's good to see players like Schaub making the All-Star showcase, the fact remains that holding the game before the Super Bowl limits the number of talented players.

Fortunately, none of the changes are set in stone.

Goodell said that the new Pro Bowl concept was a work in progress when the announcement was first made last year.

"We are looking at alternatives to strengthen the Pro Bowl," Goodell told NFL.com.

He went on to say, "We will continue to work with the players to make it a great event and will evaluate this concept after the 2010 Pro Bowl."

Lindsey Vonn: Out to prove she is the best

By JAMES FISH
Epoch Times Staff

Skiing is perhaps the quintessential winter sport—snow and ice, speed and risk, skill and finesse. Skiing embodies everything of both winter and sport.

American Lindsey Vonn is arguably the best female skier in the world. Speed, risk, skill, and finesse define her perfectly.

Twice World Cup overall champion with 22 World Cup titles, 26-year-old Lindsey Vonn is the star of the U.S. Olympic Ski team. With her all-out, all-the-time style, she is a strong favourite to bring home medals at the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver.

Lindsey Vonn started skiing at the age of 3, and started racing not long after she started public school.

"I began racing at 7, and by 9, I was doing international events," she says on her Web site. She had so much talent, her family relocated to Vail, Colorado, when she was 12 so she could practice with the best.

At 17, Vonn competed in the 2002 Olympics, finishing sixth in the combined (slalom and downhill) competition.

After the 2002 Olympics, Vonn started racing—and winning—on the U.S., Junior World, and World Cup circuits. In 2003, she won a silver medal and a bronze medal at the U.S. Nationals, and a silver medal at the Junior World Cup. In 2004, she got her first World Cup win, and was ranked No. 6 in the world.

Vonn went to the 2006 Olympics ready to win it all, but a high-speed crash in practice held her back. Skiing with a badly bruised hip, she still managed to finish eighth in downhill, seventh in super-G, and fourteenth in the slalom.

She crashed and injured herself



ALL-OUT: Lindsey Vonn clears a gate during the FIS World Cup Women's Slalom in December in Are, Sweden.

OLIVIER MORIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

twice more in 2006, but still managed to win and place at international events. "When you fall down, just get up again," is her philosophy. "Setbacks help you to concentrate. When successes fall into your lap, you lose sight of your goals."

Vonn proved her philosophy by winning the World Cup overall championship in 2007 and 2008.

Also in 2007, she married her boyfriend, Thomas Vonn, himself a former ski racer. She credits him for some of her successes. "Thanks to Thomas I can focus entirely on my sport," she says on her Web site. "He can console me, motivate me, or take my mind off things when it's not going so well."

Last year was an up-and-down year for Vonn. She decided not to focus only on one or two events, but to excel at every alpine skiing discipline: slalom, giant slalom, downhill, and super-G. She won nine golds and seven other medals in the four disciplines, demonstrating that she truly is one of the best skiers in the world.

Vonn will compete in five events in Vancouver: super-combined, downhill, super-g, slalom, and giant slalom. The program is ambitious, but perfectly suited to prove her point: that Lindsey Vonn is the best female skier in the world.



SHE'S THE BEST: Lindsey Vonn celebrates after winning the women's World Cup downhill race in Haus im Ennstal on Jan. 9. WILDBILD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



JUST RACING? Michael Waltrip rams Casey Mears during the Dan Lowry 400 at Richmond International Raceway in May, 2008. DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR's new 'rubbing is racing' rule open to interpretation

By JAMES FISH
Epoch Times Staff

For years NASCAR has been the premier racing series in North America. If you ask a co-worker, "Did you see the race?" it is understood that you mean the NASCAR race.

But over the past few seasons, NASCAR has seen ratings slip. Fans have complained about the drivers having no personalities and the racing being too clean.

As NASCAR exploded in popularity in the mid-'90s, NASCAR management, led by CEO and Chairman Brian France, became hyperconscious of the sport's media presence.

As sponsorship dollars outweighed track admission revenue, NASCAR decided to groom its drivers into polished, wholesome, and sometimes rather bland product spokespersons.

NASCAR decided to get away from the image of "redneck racing." Some of the car-to-car contact and on-track retaliation had to be stopped—after all, NASCAR was now a family sport, and parents wouldn't want their children to see drivers deliberately causing accidents.

Problem was NASCAR fans thrived on the feuds between drivers, the on-track duels. So some fans lost interest.

In an effort to regain some of those lost fans, NASCAR has decided to relax the rules.

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In the words of Brian France, "NASCAR is a contact sport—our history is based on banging fenders."

"It's time for us to allow the drivers to drive," France said in a statement

on www.NASCAR.com. "We don't want the rules and regulations to get in the way of great racing and fantastic finishes."

Or, as NASCAR President Mike Helton put it, "There's an age-old saying that 'If you ain't rubbin', you ain't racin'." That's what the NASCAR fan and the NASCAR stakeholder bought into and all expect now. Our role is to deliver that."

So, what does this mean for drivers and fans? Are we back to the days of fistfights in the pits, pro-wrestling-style challenges in post-race interviews, and unregulated collisions on the track?

DOUBTFUL. Helton also said, "We are still there looking at the unfolding of the race as it might relate to a driver going too far. There is still going to be a line to cross—it'll be over-aggressive driving."

Which raises the problem with this new policy: How will it be implemented? Who makes the call?

Every series permits a different amount of inter-car contact, and if the drivers know the rules going into the race, they can drive accordingly.

But if the enforcement of the rules is arbitrary, or uneven, then drivers—and fans—might be just as unhappy as they were with the more restrictive rules.

NASCAR has been exceedingly non-specific so far.

"What we are encouraging competitors to do is for their characters and their personality—within reason—to be unfolded," Helton said.

NASCAR should be applauded for trying to please its core fans. Fans can only hope that there are specific details underlying the vague press statements.