

Overtime Proposal

A NEW OVERTIME FORMAT - THE FIELD POSITION AUCTION

The format of the field position auction is still sudden death (first team to score a field goal or touchdown wins), but there is no coin flip or kickoff involved. Instead, the overtime period begins with the head coach of each team bidding for field position.

The coach who is willing to take possession closest to his own end zone gets the ball. After taking the ball, the offensive team drives towards the opposite end zone (i.e., if possession is taken at the 15 yard line, the offense must advance the ball across mid-field to score a field goal or touchdown). A team with a strong offense would likely choose to take the ball near their goal line and trust their ability to drive the ball into scoring position, or at least to a point where a punt still leaves their defense in a favorable position. But if the offensive team goes three and out, they'll be punting near their own goal line and likely give the opposing team good field position. Likewise, a team with a strong defense may choose to give the other team the ball first and play for a quick stop and punt.

Either way, the head coach is in control of his team's destiny. Coaches cannot complain if their offense doesn't get a chance to score. *If you want the ball, take it. But be careful what you ask for.*

THE AUCTION CONCEPT

Following are three conceptually equivalent procedures for determining offensive possession and field position.

SILENT AUCTION

Each coach writes down a yard line at which they would elect to start their offense. The numbers are given to the referee in sealed envelopes; whichever coach picked the lower yard line wins the auction and gets the ball first. To avoid choosing the same yard line, it may be specified that one coach can only pick yard lines (e.g., 10,11,12, etc.) and the other coach can only pick half-yard lines (e.g., 10.5, 11.5, 12.5, etc.). The team that takes possession drives towards the opposite end zone. The game plays out just as it does now: sudden death overtime, first team to score wins.

LIVE BIDDING AUCTION 1

At the beginning of overtime, the two head coaches meet the referee at centerfield. Each coach brings the same red flag they use to signal an instant replay challenge. The referee starts the "bidding" at the 1-yard line, and moves up rapidly in one-yard increments away from the goal line (1-yard line.... 2- yard line.... 3-yard line.... etc.). The coach who wants to put his offense on the field first throws his flag and receives the ball at the last yard line the referee called out. That team takes possession and drives towards the opposite end zone. The game plays out sudden death overtime.

LIVE BIDDING AUCTION 2

Again, the referee starts the bidding at the 1-yard line and counts in one-yard increments away from the goal line. At every yard line, possession is offered to one coach or the other in an alternating fashion (i.e., Coach 1 is offered possession at the 1-yard line; Coach 2 is offered possession at the 2-yard line; Coach 1 is offered possession at the 3-yard line; etc.). The first coach to accept the referee's offer gets the ball and drives toward the opposite end zone. The game plays out in sudden death. Notice that this format is equivalent to Live Bidding Auction 1 but utilizes alternating bidding as opposed to a flag throw.

Note: Live Bidding Auctions 1 and 2 could also be reversed to start from a relatively high yard line (such as the 35), with coaches bidding down *toward* their own end zone. The first coach to act would start on defense.

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STRENGTHS OF THE AUCTION CONCEPT

Equitability. Fairness is implicit in any auction- here, the head coach decides the value of field position. The system allows the coach to weigh the strengths/weaknesses of his own team, and eliminates the inherently unfair advantage afforded the team that wins the coin flip under the current system.

Brevity. Because the sudden death format has been retained, overtime will not be appreciably longer than it currently is.

Excitement. Imagine the excitement of live bidding! Two head coaches meet face-to-face at centerfield in a test of guts and strategy. The home crowd goes crazy as the bidding proceeds, imploring their coach to take the ball and drive to victory. However, the hometown coach must stay cool to ensure he doesn't end up pinned against his own goal-line on fourth down....

WEAKNESSES OF ALTERNATIVE METHODS

Current College System: This is another system where the coin flip affects the outcome. The team that wins the coin flip nearly always chooses to take the ball second because they benefit from knowing what the other team did on the first possession. The college system compromises the integrity of the game by using a shortened field. In addition, games are often protracted—double, triple, even quadruple overtimes are not uncommon.

Adjusting the Kickoff Position: Some have suggested that moving the overtime kickoff to the 35-yard line (or even closer to mid-field) would benefit the kicking team and thus neutralize the advantage currently enjoyed by the receiving team. This is true to some extent, but because of the touchback rule, teams could generally be assured of offensive possession at the 20-yard line or better. Hence it is not likely that coaches would elect to kick the ball no matter how the kickoff position is adjusted. Furthermore, fans eager to see a change in the current overtime format might barely notice this adjustment — they would be left wanting a more definitive change. And they wouldn't want to see any more coin flips.

First Team to Score Six Points Wins: There are at least two obvious problems with this system: First, it will unquestionably lengthen the overtime period. Second, it fails to eliminate the unfair advantage afforded the team that wins the coin flip.

The mandate for change is there. Give the head coach the power to determine his team's fate. The field position auction will:

- Provide an equitable way to decide overtime.
- Keep the length of the overtime within current time restraints.
- Create excitement that the coin flip ceremony just doesn't have.

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