

WHAT IS THE ELAM ENDING?

Don't like late-game fouling? The Elam Ending is for you.

Designed to preserve a more natural end-of-game finish, the Elam Ending calls for the game clock to be shut off at the first dead ball under four minutes in the fourth quarter or second half. A target score is then established by adding seven points to the leading team's score. For example, if the score is 73-68, the two teams will play until someone reaches 80. With no game clock in play, trailing teams are allowed to focus on getting stops and buckets, rather than intentionally fouling.



After originally testing the rule out on a part-time basis in 2017, The Basketball Tournament implemented it for all games beginning in 2018. The results were eye-opening. Not only did fans embrace the concept, but it led to a noticeably better end-of-game experience both on the court and in the stands.

In the summer of 2019, NBA All-Star and Team CP3 GM Chris Paul made a recommendation to NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and proposed implementing the Elam Ending at the 2020 All-Star Game. "I'm all about strategy and the way you have to think the game down the stretch," says Paul. The league officially went ahead with the Elam Ending and as a way to honor the late L.A. Lakers great Kobe Bryant, added 24 points to the leading team's total after three quarters.

The competing teams ended up playing to a target score of 157, leading to one of the best finishes for an NBA All-star game. The rule was also adopted by New Zealand's National Basketball League in May of 2020.

WHY IS THE ELAM ENDING A BETTER WAY TO END BASKETBALL GAMES?

Many of us have a misconception about how often games end with a meaningful made basket. Under the regular format, when a game ends with an unsuccessful meaningful possession, the clock does the heavy lifting (and turns the most important possession of the game into a blooper reel), not the defense. Even for some of the rare games that end with a buzzer-beater (those released in a tie game), the Elam Ending would raise the stakes and enhance the drama. All that remains is the fraction of a percent of games that end with a do-or-die buzzer-beater (where the team that wins at the buzzer was trailing at the time they released the shot); those are definitely cool, but even then the clock still dampens the celebration by necessitating a replay review.

The Elam ending allows teams to play at a high level all the way through the end of the game and take their best shot on the last possession of the game. It provided greater hope for late comebacks as long as you can continue to get defensive stops. And it provided more memorable game-ending moments.

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