

Are 'flops' a success in basketball?

Researchers reveal widespread cheating is not beneficial after all

October 28 2014

A lack of sufficient punishment for deception facilitates "flopping" in basketball, according to new research from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU), which revealed that two-thirds of the falls were found to be intentional. Based on the research, the authors believe that players and teams are unaware of the cost/benefit analysis of "flopping" or the negative effect of falling if no offensive foul is awarded, which is indeed the case 90 percent of the time.

In the study, published recently in the *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, the researchers determined that game referees repeatedly failed to penalize flopping players, even in the most flagrant cases of deception. "In fact, no warnings or technical fouls were recorded during the whole season that was analyzed," explains Elia Morgulev, Ph.D. candidate at BGU's Guilford Glazer Faculty of Business and Management.

Videotapes of actual decisions by referees in offensive foul situations from 501 plays during Israeli Super League games were shown to several professional [basketball](#) coaches and referees engaged as experts. "The experts could use slow motion and multiple viewings to make the call, so we compared their more accurate decisions to the game referee calls," Morgulev explains.

Referees were found to have almost always ignored situations in which

the defender stayed on his feet after the attacking player bumped him, with only three percent of the 251 "standing incidents" called fouls by the referee. On the other hand, the experts, with more time to review options, judged that 23.1 percent of these cases justified an offensive foul call.

"The defender improves his chances of drawing an offensive foul to some extent by falling intentionally vs. standing," Morgulev explains. "However professional players and coaches should be expected to make a broader assessment of their decisions and refrain from myopic thinking that flops are the right course of action."

With the 2014 NBA season starting next week, Morgulev believes that flopping should receive a more significant fine or punishment. Even without harsher penalties, from a team perspective, it might be still doing more harm than good.

"Overall, the player is barely able to mislead the official and draw the offensive foul with a flop successfully in less than 10 percent of the time," Morgulev states. "So in the other 90 percent, the flopping player is simply left lying on the ground, leaving his team with four active defenders instead of five while the game goes on. Our methodical analyses of game outcomes in those cases reveal that flopping does more harm than good from the defending team perspective."

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Citation: Are 'flops' a success in basketball? Researchers reveal widespread cheating is not beneficial after all (2014, October 28) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-10-flops-success-basketball-reveal-widespread.html>

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