

Will high school basketball in Utah ever implement a shot clock? It's complicated.

It's difficult to imagine two basketball teams not scoring a single combined point in a quarter of a state tournament game. But that's exactly what happened between Brighton and Lone Peak nearly six years ago.

It was March 2013, and to give themselves a chance, the Bengals chose to hold the ball for practically the entire second quarter in an attempt to stall out the Knights, who were ranked No. 1 in the nation that season. The plan didn't work, but it sparked outrage and eventually led to [calls for the implementation of a shot clock](#) for high school basketball in Utah.

But that was then. Players have graduated, coaches have moved on, the White House has changed hands. However, the underlying sentiment and debate around shot clocks has not. For the most part, players, coaches and athletic directors at schools of all classifications still want it, citing myriad benefits that they feel outweigh the drawbacks.

So why hasn't it happened yet? The answer is a bit complicated.

"Our boards really have just never gotten a compelling enough argument that's been able to get far enough on the legislative chain to really even be discussed in great length," said Jon Oglesby, assistant director of the Utah High School Activities Association.

It's not just the UHSAA. Theresia Wynns, director of sports and officials education for the National Federation of State High School Associations, the body that enforces rules and changes them for every high school in the country, said there has not been an "overwhelming" sentiment around the country calling for shot clocks at the prep level.

But many in Utah think implementing a shot clock would benefit the game of basketball as a whole. Stalling is still the main concern among players and coaches, even though the practice has been less egregious in recent years.

Isaac Johnson, star senior at American Fork High, recalled a game last season in which his team trailed by one point and held the ball for two and a half minutes. They wanted the best shot possible, he said, but his recollection was the sequence "sucked."

Malli Valgardson, who played at Pleasant Grove High and is now a freshman on the BYU women's team, remembered a game in her junior year of high school where Timpview held the ball for an entire quarter. Ashley Beckstrand, an alumna of Desert Hills High and also a BYU freshman, noted a similar story of stalling where she saw fans "actually get up and leave the gym because it was just so boring."

There also are plenty of arguments against implementing a shot clock in Utah. Critics say it would cost too much money to buy the clocks, install them and find people who aren't volunteers to operate them. Not every school in the state has the resources to do that.

Changing the rule with the UHSAA is another process in itself, akin to a long conga line. The coaches association has to bring forth a proposal to the athletic directors executive committee. If the measure has

enough support from ADEC, it goes to the UHSAA executive committee. From there, the proposal would be brought forth to the UHSAA board of trustees for a final vote.

But voting yay on a shot clock measure would mean forfeiting the UHSAA's membership with the NFHS, and thus a seat on the basketball rules committee. The UHSAA values that seat, Oglesby said.

ON THE CLOCK

States that use a shot clock in high school basketball: California, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota and Washington

States that are considering adding a shot clock for prep basketball games: Texas experimented with them during its state tournaments in December. Arkansas is currently trying them for one school year.

Also: Wisconsin approved a shot clock in 2017, but then rescinded its decision just a few months later. The change would have taken place in 2019-20 season.

Still, those that actually take the court and compete long for a change to the rule.

Over the years, Matt Barnes, boys coach at Olympus High and head of the coaches association, has "done everything you can possibly do, on my end, trying to get it implemented." He doesn't like what it does to the end of quarters and games in particular.

"It makes the end of the quarter a lot different," said Matt Barnes, boys coach at Olympus High and head of the coaches association. "In Utah, anywhere from six minutes on, people start stalling, people hold the

ball. So a four-point game is really like a 10-point game."

Barnes said he conducted a survey a couple of years ago across the 5A, 4A and 3A classifications to gauge coaches' interest in implementing a shot clock. The results were 53-2 in favor for 5A and 4A combined, and 3A also voted in favor, albeit by a lesser margin.

Coaches, like Tim Drisdorn of Intermountain Christian High, think a shot clock will make the game more fun for them as well.

"It makes coaches have to have a scheme," said Drisdorn, who is also the athletic director at Intermountain Christian. "You have to have something that's effective. You have to have the ability to make adjustments. I mean there's just so many scenarios that just make the game so much more fun to even coach with the shot clock."

Girls basketball players would like to see shot clocks in their game as well. While Oglesby said the women's coaches association hasn't done much regarding the issue, Amanda Barker, who coaches the Provo High girls, said it's time for shot clocks to get implemented in the state.

"I think we gotta have it," Barker said. "I think it would bring some more competitiveness to the sport here. I think our kids are ready for it."

Wynns said high-level basketball players who don't experience shot clocks aren't affected by that because they frequently also play on AAU or travel teams in states where a clock is used. But playing on an AAU or similar team can get expensive, Beckstrand said, so having a shot clock already in high school play will give every player the

opportunity to experience something she feels is part of basketball culture.

"My love for the game has increased with a shot clock all the time now because it's so much more entertaining, Beckstrand said.

Barnes said unless the NFHS decides to change its rule, he does not see Utah getting a shot clock any time soon. It only takes one high school association to propose a rule change for the NFHS to discuss it.

No state submitted a proposal for a shot clock last year, Wynns said, but there were proposals in several consecutive years prior. California plans to submit a proposal this year, said Cici Robinson, a director at the California Interscholastic Federation who oversees basketball. The NFHS rules committee for basketball meets in late April.

Craig Hammer, chair of the UHSAA executive committee, said he has not felt the pressure from coaches to implement a shot clock in the state. Barnes, however, said the issue has "always been a huge conversation."

For all the arguments for and against, signs point to the status quo prevailing in regards to shot clocks in Utah high school basketball. At least for the near future. But it appears that if enough people rally behind the cause, it could have a chance to go somewhere.

"It's hard to get stuff like that rolling," said Trever Wilson, head of the ADEC committee. "But if the coaches really want it and it's good for the state, then I'm all for it."