

Save Our Scoring System

The expanding use of tiebreakers and No-Ad scoring is destroying the game's integrity.

By Paul Fein

In 2001, the Australian Open shattered tradition by adopting 10-point tiebreakers in lieu of deciding sets for mixed doubles. Doubles star Todd Woodbridge, then the ATP Players Council president, warned: "Eventually it's going to go to men's doubles and women's doubles, and in the long term, singles as well. And then tennis is no longer a true test of skill and will. What they're doing to mixed doubles now is the beginning of the downfall of the whole game."

Woodbridge's prediction proved prescient. Five years later, the ATP adopted the 10-point tiebreaker in lieu of deciding sets in doubles at all tour events—and installed No-Ad scoring to further distance itself from the sport's classic scoring system. The WTA followed suit in mid-2007. Today, only Wimbledon abstains from using the 10-point tiebreaker in place of deciding sets in mixed doubles.

If WTA CEO Steve Simon has his way, the last domino of Woodbridge's doomsday scenario will fall. Simon, who believes the ideal match length is 60 to 90 minutes, claims it's necessary to implement both the 10-point tiebreaker and No-Ad scoring in singles by 2019 or 2020.

"We need to begin embracing our future audience," Simon told reporters this September at the Wuhan Open. "Now, if a video is more than 20 seconds, it is too long and [people] won't even look at it."

We need to remember, however, that fairness and credibility matter. Tennis' traditional scoring system increases the odds that the more skilled player will win a given game, while No-Ad scoring unfairly boosts the chances of the less



skilled player, who needs just one point to win a game from deuce. Fluke shots, bad bounces, net cords and incorrect line calls take on undue significance in shortened scoring formats. Much like the 10-point tiebreaker damages the integrity of the *set*, No-Ad scoring damages the integrity of the *game*.

"The third-set super tiebreaker is not a true test, and the best player or team doesn't always win," argues former Wimbledon champion Pat Cash. "It is usually the player or team with momentum at the time that wins."

Simon's panicky, misguided proposals would destroy one of tennis' crowning glories: its brilliant scoring system. Longer, closer matches—including the fluctuating crises of ad-in and ad-out—are more entertaining. The scoring system provides us with classics that make a connection with fans, as Rafael Nadal

has noted. Television commentator and former pro player Mary Carillo recently called a tiebreaker in lieu of a third set "illegitimate."

If attendances are decreasing in tennis, "It is not because of long matches," observes former French Open singles champion Virginia Ruzici, "but mainly because of a lack of big rivalries which create intense, dramatic matches." ■



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