

## **Stormy Courts**

**By Prof. Gil Fried, The Crowd Management Doctor, University of West Florida**

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Court storming is a right of passage. So was paddling, wedgies, and other antics that we have decided as a society need to end. Maybe it is time to stop court/field storming. The following represent some insight from Professor Gil Fried of the University of West Florida (Professor and Interim Assistant Dean of the College of Business) who is often referred to as the Crowd Management Doctor. Prof. Fried has written extensively on the topic and has been educating security personnel for many years. He also has been an expert witness in some of the largest United States crowd management cases in the past 30 years, including crowds storming fields at college football games and a high school basketball game often mentioned in many articles (the Kay case from 2024 in Arizona). Kay was injured during a court storming by fans after a high school basketball game and suffered a torn carotid artery (and a stroke) that left him paralyzed on his right side. He was going to be a volleyball player at Stanford University before the injury changed his life.

[https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/\\_/id/9019013/joe-kay-so-bering-rushing-court-story](https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/9019013/joe-kay-so-bering-rushing-court-story))

The following represent some ideas to consider related to court storming.

There have been numerous ideas presented, but some of the easiest solutions really have not been promoted for fear of alienating fans. The positive and negative to various solutions will be considered along with the historical backdrop of what is now front and center for many sport fans.

### **Storming Incident**

Early 2024 was a tough month for basketball fans and their celebration around basketball games. On February 24<sup>th</sup>, Duke's star player Kyle Filipowski was injured when fans collided with him when they stormed the court after a victory by Wake Forest against the Blue Devils. The students came so fast onto the court that Filipowski had no time to protect himself.

(<https://www.cbssports.com/college-basketball/news/kyle-filipowski-injury-breaking-down-the-film-on-duke-stars-run-in-with-court-storming-wake-forest-fans/>)

That incident came shortly after Iowa star basketball player Caitlin Clark avoided serious injury when a fan rushed onto the court after Ohio State beat the Hawkeyes. The fan can be seen on video running onto the court with her phone in the air taking a picture or video. The fan was oblivious to arguably the best college basketball player in the country and easily could have seriously injured her. Wha

<https://ftw.usatoday.com/2023/12/northwestern-fans-nearly-stormed-the-court-too-early-in-upset-of-no-1-purdue>)

Since the start of 2024, there have been three court storms after Big Ten basketball games at Nebraska: January 9- when the Cornhuskers routed top-ranked Purdue; February 1, when the Cornhuskers came back from 19 points down to beat No. 6 Wisconsin in overtime; and February 11, when the Nebraska women's team overcame a 14-point deficit to defeat Clark and No. 2 Iowa.

## **What are the possible solutions, and do they work?**

The following are various solutions that have been undertaken or suggested to deal with court/field storming.

### **Fines**

SEC imposes a fine of \$100,000 for the first storming of a basketball or football game. The next occurrence results in a \$250,000 fine and the third instance results in a \$500,000 fine. The fines have been around for years and have no real impact. In fact, many schools and alumni raise the funds through online sites such as Go Fund Me to get fans to contribute to pay a fine. Other conferences or leagues also have fines, but some of them are token fines with no real bite. The following represent some fines since 2023.

- \$100,000: LSU basketball (beat Kentucky on Feb. 21)
- \$100,000: South Carolina basketball (beat Kentucky on Jan. 23)
- \$5,000: Santa Clara basketball (beat Gonzaga on Jan. 11)
- \$25,000: UCF basketball (beat Kansas on Jan. 10)
- \$100,000: Ole Miss football (beat LSU on Sept. 30, 2023)
- \$100,000: Missouri football (beat Kansas State on Sept. 16, 2023)

While fines might appear to generate some publicity they really do not change conduct. The best example entails fines for speeding. Many drivers are speeding and only slow down when they see an officer. They know the

cost, but they are thinking about the odds and feel they are likely to get away with it. Others might feel storming is worth it to generate enthusiasm and excitement for a program. In fact, paying a fine might well be worth the recruiting cache that could be generated when prospects see the enthusiasm on campus.

### **Have a plan**

Many pundits say that venues need a plan. As someone who has been involved in this space for years. They all have plans. Some plans are in a three-inch-thick binder for each game which highlights the potential detail. I am sure that plans also contain elements associated with

## **More Security**

Some pundits claim that if more security is present there would not be any storming incidents. That is pure speculation and contradicted by so many years of examples. Security, whether ushers, security, non-uniformed officers, or uniformed police can have a possible impact on some

people behind pushing forward. This is sometimes seen at concerts or other events where

barrier(another example that barriers often don't work) but the folks in the communication booth thought it would be fun to encourage inappropriate student behavior. The better option is to convey to students the need to be safe and to not undertake dangerous activities.

### **Alcohol Sales**

One concern raised by many is whether students and others are possible impaired by alcohol. Some have advocated for discontinuing alcohol sales after a given time. Alcohol sales are often stopped after the half at football games and around the 12:00 media timeout in the 2nd half for men's basketball and end of the 3rd quarter for women's basketball. While this might seem to be an easy solution, it is not. Alcohol sales are relatively new for college sports and crowds storming courts/fields has happened for years before alcohol sales were approved at the college level. Many students are also cost conscious and they sneak in alcohol or partake in drinking before heading to a venue. Furthermore, there are similar alcohol sales issues with professional sports and there are rarely any storming incidents in professional sports. That does not mean there are no streakers or individual who try to enter the field/court in professional sports (remember Morgana the Kissing Bandit- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHuICk7VOFc>) but they are the exception rather than the rule.

### **Alternative Celebrations**

Some have suggested holding a separate celebration or delaying the rush onto the field/court until officials and opponents have left. While these might seem like reasonable approaches, they would not work when students want to celebrate the moment a victory is achieved and not wait around ten minutes for the field/court to empty out. Similarly, many students think it is a tradition

and want to be

[hp?cod=R40Y2017N03A0267](http://hp?cod=R40Y2017N03A0267)) If athletes can be injured while celebrating, the average fan can likewise face serious injuries, especially when being jostled, bumped, and trampled by others. While most injuries might be minor, they are injuries none-the-less. There is no way to eliminate all these injuries and some can escalate into serious injuries, even when unintentional. The issue with court/field storming entails the risk of injury to fans and players alike. The risk of injury can also impact those who are not interested in going onto the field or court. Many fans have been caught-up in the movement of others and were injured on no fault of their own.

One of the interesting areas of possible con / entails

tournament. That would be a huge incentive for fans to police themselves and not storm a court.

### **Loss of a Home Game**

Another option is to have the next home game for a school cancelled. This could lose the school a lot of money in ticket sales and concession revenue. It can also serve as a warning that future actions could result in even more game cancellations for the home team. This might result in some contractual issues, but it would put pressure on administrators to change behavior.

### **Change Culture**

All the various solutions suggested fail to address the primary issue which is fans themselves and how they behave. Years ago, there were no fan codes of conduct. People were expected to behave in a certain manner. Civility has been lost, often more so on college campuses. This can be seen in the anti-Israel rhetoric on college campuses where any dissenting opinions are shot down. This lack of civility needs to change and that is where University officials can educate their students as to what is appropriate behavior. It might require a carrot and stick approach, but all the risk management efforts discussed are only Band-Aid solutions when the underlying condition is not addressed.

### **Utilize the Legal System**

Those who want to storm a court/field should be informed that such efforts are a violation of trespass laws and individuals would be fully prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Professional sport venues issue trespass bars for those

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- Shoot public service announcements with star players, campus leaders, and coaches
- Have warning show on the video screen
- Have warning aired on the PA system
- Have officials make statements as to the possible penalty for such behavior before a close game ends
- Broadcast footage of the storming around campus and indicate what penalties were imposed for those who engaged in the conduct
- Have public hearing for those caught violating the rule
- Promote what punishments were meted out to discourage future potential issues.

There is no perfect solution, but efforts need to be taken to minimize the risks associated with such behavior before someone unfortunately dies. The same type of concern was seen in Major League Baseball (MLB) with foul ball netting. It took several serious injuries publicized on social media and the death of a Dodgers fan for MLB to take serious efforts to better protect fans with more netting. W vid