

Bryant University

Bubble or Trouble?

Restarting professional sports while weighing the risks for athletes

Bryant University Virtual Summer Research and Innovation Village

By: Matt Sidell and Jared Wu

Abstract:

During an unprecedented time in our society, professional sports are just starting to make their returns despite not having a vaccine or cure for COVID-19. The NBA is playing in their Orlando bubble in the ESPN World Wide of Sports complex to conclude their season in one place. The NHL has one hub city for each conference, Toronto for the eastern and Edmonton for the western. Looking beyond the two leagues, the impact the pandemic has had on society has been substantial, and restarting sports for the entire country during this time may end up being a tall task. With this, we consider whether or not professional sports and specifically, the NBA and NHL should restart their seasons considering the risks. As the NBA and NHL have just begun their respective restarts, this brings a debate on if these seasons will reach the end and determine a winner.

Key Words: Bubble, Safety, COVID-19, Testing, Restart, Opt-Out, Revenue

Introduction:

The start of the COVID led to what seemed like an indefinite end to sports, along with the dilemma of how sports should be reintegrated into the daily U.S. lifestyle. The N.B.A. halted their season abruptly on March 11th, after a positive COVID-19 test on All-Star Center Rudy Gobert. Since then, the N.B.A. has been on hiatus, until they started games on July 30th, under a bubble format. The NHL suspended play on March 12th for safety reasons with plans to resume the season August 1st. With the COVID virus still spreading around the world, this brings the dilemma of if restarting sports is worth the risks of a further outbreak among the professional athletes and those around them.

NBA Bubble:

As the virus is present in the U.S. and throughout the world, it would be impossible for teams to travel to cities and for fans to be at stadiums as games are typically held. The NBA restart plans are occurring in a “bubble” at the ESPN World Wide of Sports Complex, owned by Disney, in Orlando, Florida. The restart includes 22 of the 30 N.B.A. teams, all of which are either projected to make the playoffs or are within eight games of a playoff spot during the time the season paused. Teams will each be guaranteed eight regular season games starting July 30th, which will then be followed by the playoffs. Players have been given housing at the many Disney hotels, along with entertainment such as early screenings to unreleased Disney movies and a private golf course as an incentive to keep players safe and from leaving the campus. Safety protocols for these activities include the requirement of a mask in public areas and social distancing with other players and personnel.

A problem for players is that after such a long layover, they might not be prepared for a restart, especially with the most important games, the playoffs. Luckily for teams, they were given around three weeks from the beginning of July until games start on July 30th to practice at their facilities, and eventually in Orlando as the restart nears. In addition to a training camp, teams have also participated in three scrimmages against other teams. While a huge layoff in the middle of a season is never ideal, the training camp and eleven games played before the playoffs helped that teams prepare for important games, while getting accustomed to a brand new environment, one without fans and with different arenas. One might argue that the scrimmages will allow for more time for contact with other groups, but it is a safe practice for these teams. They will have already been inside the bubble for 3 weeks by that point and are tested

repeatedly, so it is safe for these teams to have the scrimmages. Another aspect is the fans, it will be important for the fans because they have been longing for basketball for so long.

It is crucial for players not to leave the campus as much as possible during their stay. According to Sopan Deb and Scott Cacciola of the New York Times, "If a player does leave the campus without permission and tries to re-enter, he will be quarantined for at least ten days." (Deb, Cacciola, p.16). This makes it crucial for players and their visiting family members to refrain from leaving the campus, resulting in the player missing multiple practices and games. However, early results have looked promising. Based on the July 20th announcement, "Of the 346 players tested for COVID-19 on the NBA campus since test results were last announced on July 13, zero have returned confirmed positive tests," (Johnson, p.2). During a time where the virus is still spreading around the world, it is great news to hear that in a contact sport, the NBA has endured a virus free first week inside the NBA bubble. As the regular season games are just starting, all games will be played on campus at the basketball arenas, which will keep all players contained on campus until the end of their season, which at latest will be in the middle of October.

In addition to preparing for the season with eight regular season games, these eight games will be financially beneficial for each of the 22 teams returning. According to Sam Quinn, if the season stopped and would not restart, NBA teams would have lost around \$900 million dollars. While ticket sales and not having a full 82 game season will prevent teams from recouping all of the money, a substantial portion of the losses will be saved if the season concludes. A large portion of a team's revenue comes from their TV deals. According to CBS sports writer Sam Quinn "regional sports networks are owed at least 70 games in those deals, and most teams are

currently in the mid-60s.” (Quinn, p.2). This allows teams to complete their part of the deal to bring seventy games to their regional providers, allowing for them to get the full payout from their television deal for this season.

As for the eight teams that are not returning, they will also benefit from not playing games. In the N.B.A., some teams often rebuild their teams for future years, putting significance on draft picks as opposed to wins for a few years. According to Jeremy Woo from Sports Illustrated, “Golden State, Cleveland, Minnesota, Atlanta, Detroit, New York, Chicago, and Charlotte—have their lottery odds locked in (in that order), with the Warriors, Cavaliers, and Timberwolves each holding 14% odds of winning the No. 1 pick.” (Woo, p. 2). With their season ending, these teams will have the eight best odds of the number one pick, regardless of how the rest of the season plays out. This will benefit each of those teams as they were unlikely to make the playoffs. A top draft pick can change a franchise, and this will allow each of these teams to start their offseason early, giving their teams additional rest and preparation for the next season. An organization such as the Golden State Warriors, who were affected by injuries to star players Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson, will benefit from the restart as they were already eliminated from playoff contention, and their players will be given more than enough time to heal from their injuries.

Before the restart, players have argued that basketball is unnecessary and unsafe to restart this year. According to Marc Stein of the New York Times, a primary concern is the restrictions on daily life that would be imposed on players in the bubble environment conceived by the league to prevent the coronavirus from spreading. Perhaps an even more significant issue is the suggestion from some players that returning to work could divert the spotlight from, or also

hamper, efforts made by numerous N.B.A. players to take an active role in the surging Black Lives Matter movement worldwide. Point Guard Malcolm Brogdon said, "I've talked to a few guys that are super interested in sitting out possibly. Some guys are going to say, 'For health reasons, like COVID and the long-term effects that we don't understand about COVID, I want to sit out.' Other guys are going to say: 'The black community and my people are going through too much for me to be distracted with basketball. I'm not going to prioritize this over the black community, I'm going to sit out.'" (Stein, p.14). As a result of this, the NBA has now approved 29 different phrases players are allowed to feature on their jerseys during the restart. According to Adrian Wojnarowski and Marc Spears, "The National Basketball Players Association and the NBA reached an agreement Friday on social justice messages that can be displayed above the numbers on the backs of jerseys when the league resumes play July 30, a source told ESPN's The Undeclared." (Wojnarowski, Spears, p.1). This includes the popular quote "Black Lives Matter" along with 28 other quotes players can choose from if they want to have a quote on their jersey.

Center Bam Adebayo was worried about getting injured, saying, "We want to play and give our teams the best chance of winning a championship. But at the end of the day, we're also thinking about our families and our lives and how they could change if we get hurt." (Reynolds, p.10). This could be a threat to the N.B.A., as losing players may make it difficult to restart a season and give the N.B.A. finals an "asterisk" as the win was due to possibly lesser competition. Even with the N.B.A. having an "enhanced insurance plan" for players, according to Stein, that may not be enough for players as there are incredibly high risks of getting hurt or also catching the COVID virus, which was evident when players opted out of the season. The players had a three-month break from basketball once the N.B.A. restarts, and some players may not be in

pristine shape, making it possible for many injuries to occur. If the restart does not end well and the virus spreads throughout the campus, or many players get injured, this could cause an uproar in the N.B.A. for years to come.

A new development in the restart of the N.B.A. is the rising concern of COVID-19 cases across the country, including where the N.B.A. will start up in Florida. Commissioner Adam Silver was asked about his concerns about the rising of cases, "Of course, we designed our campus, in essence, to isolate ourselves from whatever the level of cases was in the surrounding community." (Stein p.12). Commissioner Silver is confident that the "bubble" that the players would be living and playing in will keep them safe despite the rising number of cases in that area in particular. Despite the many precautions taken by the N.B.A., we know now that COVID can spread as easily as someone being at the wrong place at the wrong time. If superstars and all-stars become infected, that can single-handedly ruin a team's season and halt their momentum. Also to combat the bubble issue, the N.B.A. will start with testing the players every day to get fast results on the spread of COVID if many players were to catch the virus.

Along with the many risks of coming back to Orlando to play, a handful of players, including players on returning teams, have recently tested positive for COVID. According to Ben Cohen of the Wall Street Journal, 5% of N.B.A. players have tested positive for COVID before arriving at the bubble. While that may not seem to be a large number, that is a significant risk in a sport where there is contact between players and the equipment used in basketball. Some players that tested positive include Denver Nuggets All-Star Nikola Jokic, Spencer Dinwiddie of the Brooklyn Nets, Malcolm Brogdon of the Indiana Pacers, and Sacramento Kings players Jabari Parker, Buddy Hield, and Alex Len. While players that test positive have to endure a

two-week quarantine and multiple negative tests to return to play, there is still a possibility the virus can quickly spread among players. This would not only prevent the season from concluding but may be disastrous for the future as some players may experience life-changing symptoms from acquiring the virus.

The risks have caused a handful of players to back out of the N.B.A. restart, also forfeiting a portion of their salary. While players had different reasons for opting out, many were since they would be without their family and do not want to put themselves or their loved ones at risk by going to Orlando to continue the season. Without every player coming, this leaves teams at a disadvantage as they lose key players that may have made a difference in the playoffs. For example, according to Forbes writer Isabel Togoh, Los Angeles Lakers starting shooting guard Avery Bradley will not be in attendance for the Orlando restart. While this allowed the Lakers to sign a new player to replace Bradley, it is unlikely they will get the same production from their new player, who may not have played an N.B.A. game this season. Bradley said that "At a time like this, I can't imagine making any decision that might put my family's health and well-being at even the slightest risk. As promised also, I will use this time away to focus on the formation of projects to help strengthen my communities." (Togoh, p. 7). By doing this, Bradley will lose around \$650,000 in salary, quite a lot for any person to surrender. However, "That is likely to include work on a players' coalition, which Bradley co-leads with Brooklyn Nets' Kyrie Irving, focussed on pushing the league to address issues of racial equality and social justice." (Togoh, p.7). While Bradley may be trying to protect his family, as he has a six-year-old son, Bradley is also likely trying to make a statement, sitting out to prove a point at the N.B.A. restart is not what is needed at a crazy time in the world. Kyrie Irving may also be making a statement by

choosing not to play. With other players including forwards Davis Bertans, Trevor Ariza, and Wilson Chandler sitting out, many teams will miss key rotation players for the end of the regular season and the playoffs.

Missing players could make the restart feel artificial. While all-star players have not chosen to sit out, some teams will be affected by the loss of key rotation players. Even though teams are able to replace players who opt out, these players will be even more rusty, and may not be as talented as most did not play for a team this season. Losing players means having to integrate new players into a system, along with bench players getting more minutes in a style they might not be comfortable with. It may affect who wins the N.B.A. finals, as a defender such as Avery Bradley on the number one team in the Western conference can make a massive difference to the Lakers in the playoffs. One has to wonder how much money teams will lose in possible merchandise sales and a potential deflated record with some of their key players sitting at home.

The NBA has also done a great job making sure players stay inside the bubble for safety reasons. In the first week since teams have reported to the bubble, two players have accidentally left the bubble. According to ESPN writer Tim Bontemps, Kings player Richaun Holmes left the bubble briefly to pick up a food delivery while Rockets player Bruno Caboclo left his room unapproved during the initial 48 hour quarantine as players and staff first entered the bubble. Each player will now endure an additional ten days of quarantine in their room for the violations, and players that leave the bubble without NBA permission will also have to endure this penalty.

There is also a precaution for players that enter the bubble later, without the team. In the NBA handbook, it states that “If a player misses a scheduled coronavirus test in the two days

prior to the team's departure date -- or has "extenuating circumstances" that have been disclosed to the league -- he must arrange his own travel to join his team as the league restarts its season. The player has the option of flying on a charter flight at the player's expense, traveling by car, or flying commercial, the memo said. If a player flies privately or drives, he will have to have two negative test results before resuming basketball activities. If he flies commercially, the player must have three consecutive negative test results." Considering how the wide majority of players entered the bubble with their team on time, this was a good incentive for players to prevent a further inconvenience to play in Orlando. In addition, it shows the safety precautions the NBA is making, ensuring as best as possible that there will not be an outbreak of the virus in the bubble, and the season will conclude in a smooth manner.

Comparing to other Professional Sports:

In the WNBA restart, their format is very similar to the NBA. According to Percy Allen of the Seattle Times, the WNBA is being played in a bubble format similar to the NBA at IMG academy, a prep school in Bradenton Florida. While the amenities may not be as prestigious as the NBA, the overall format is similar. Both bubbles are in the state of Florida, one of the first states to reopen from the quarantine. All WNBA players will be living on campus, which is also where all their games will be played. While the NBA is approaching the playoffs, the WNBA did not start their season, and will have to play out their season in addition to the playoffs. This could present an additional risk as the WNBA will need more time in the bubble, which also gives more time for a potential spread of COVID at IMG Academy. Only time will tell how successful this bubble will turn out.

In the MLS' restart, which is in Orlando as well, we see that not every restart will go as planned. Teams are playing at the ESPN Worldwide of Sports complex in Orlando, which the NBA is also famously at. The teams planned on starting with a group-stage "World-Cup" style where each team would play three games. Once that takes place, the teams would then move onto a 16 team knockout tournament, which would not count towards regular season standings. "In addition to some sort of cash prize..., the winner will also get a spot in Concacaf Champions League" (Jeremiah Oshan, SB Nation). Overall it was planned to be an entertaining restart for the millions of soccer fans around the world and for the players, some fun games to get back into season play for a brief time. On July 6th, we saw a situation where the risk of these restarts showed. Of the 557 players tested for COVID, 13 tested positive. 10 of those positive tests came from the FC Dallas club. The club announced that after those positive cases, they have decided to

withdraw from the tournament all together. MLS commissioner Don Garber spoke on the matter, “The decision to have them not participate in the tournament is in the best interests of everyone, of the Dallas players and the other 25 teams, and allows us to continue to manage the health and safety of our players while continuing to go forward with our plan”(USA Today, Nancy Armour). What transpired in the MLS in the last couple of weeks shows us how fast a season can change. The NBA is also planning to host games in the same complex that the MLS is, and even with the NBA’S bubble, there are still concerns with players exiting the bubble. If we start to see more players exiting the bubble without permission in the NBA, there could be a team that ends up like FC Dallas. The risks are real for the NBA, but most things are going as planned so far in training camp.

The NHL Bubble Plans:

The NHL has a somewhat similar plan to the NBA, with the biggest difference being that they will jump straight into the playoffs. The NHL has a points system when it comes to each teams' position in the rankings, and to start the playoffs, the top 4 teams in each conference will receive a first round bye. The other 16 teams will each play a 5 game series based on their seed in order to get into the 8 remaining spots in the postseason bracket. For the locations of the games, there will be a location for the Western conference teams to play in and one for the Eastern conference. The Eastern conference will report to Toronto and the Western conference to Edmonton. As for the bottom 7 teams in each conference, they will be entered into a lottery system for the draft to take place in two phases beginning June 22nd. The league's plan for a player that has tested positive is not like the NBA's plan. Positive players in the NHL are, "not expected to shut down play entirely. The league has said it would isolate any player or staff member who tests positive, acknowledging an outbreak would threaten the remainder of the season" (Whyno, p. 11).

Now that the NHL season is fast approaching, teams have been in training camp for the last few weeks at their respective facilities. The league has set out rules for the players to stay inside the "bubble" host cities, similar to what the NBA is doing. If a player breaks one of these rules, there are strict consequences, including "the removal from the bubble; or in other cases, strict quarantines of up to 10-14 days" (Wyshynski, ESPN). Teams were also notified of penalties if players knowingly break rules around the bubble, including fines and losses of draft picks in the 2020 NHL draft. The strict rules of the league should definitely be the way it is if fans and teams alike want a safe start-up (and end, hopefully) to the season that was abruptly

stopped in March. It is the best way to keep the players and organizations safe when doing their jobs and it helps prevent the worst-case scenario of having to suspend the season indefinitely. Practicing proper social distancing, staying in the host cities and wearing masks are the keys to the NHL operating for the rest of the season. NHL coaches have also taken an active role in making sure their players follow the protocols set forth by the league. Philadelphia Flyers coach Alain Vigneault spoke about the players and the protocol, “I'm very confident moving forward. I think the NHL has done a very good job with the protocol, and now it's our jobs as teams to get to the bubble and get the opportunity to play” (Wyshynski, ESPN). It is a great thing that the coaches of the league are doing what they are asked and trying to help their players in this unusual situation.

An important driving factor for the players and a reason that they play are their families that support them throughout the season. For the time they are in the bubble up until the conference finals, the players will not be able to see their families unless their teams are eliminated from the playoffs. A few players have expressed that they want to keep their families safe first and foremost, and as a result have decided to opt out of the playoff portion of the season. One of these players includes Bruins defenceman Steven Kampfer who expressed in a tweet, “After speaking with my wife, family and my agent I have decided that I am opting out of the return to play ... My wife and son have a congenital heart defect which can cause complications with Covid-19. We have taken this very seriously. Family will always be my priority” (Kampfer, 2020). In challenging times like these, we should certainly respect players who want to keep their families safe and avoid the potential life-threatening situation for the family.

For the players, going into the bubble is just like any other road trip. The location of the bubble and games being in Canada is a huge deal for the league. Canada has experienced success in containing the pandemic compared to the US and it's borders are closed to the US right now, so the NHL organizations will be safe there. Compared to the NBA, the NHL's bubble is in a much safer area to be with regards to the pandemic. As the players have been adjusting to the bubble, the league reported 0 positive cases during the week of the 13th and 20th. This certainly shows that the league chose the right place to be. The coaches seem to be on board with the idea of the bubble; Boston Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy made the point, "Obviously once you get to the bubble, it appears to be a very safe environment." (Leahy, NBC Sports). In terms of the player's thoughts, Bruins centre Patrice Bergeron said he was, "excited and looking forward to what's coming next" (Leahy, NBC Sports). Some coaches and players have described what it is like being in the bubble. Minnesota Wild coach Dean Evanson described it as, ""It's different. You've got a walkway with fences. People can't see in. You can't see out. But if you embrace it and are willing just to go with things, it's pretty cool." (Leahy, NBC Sports). In addition to being safe, the teams are also experiencing a little more privacy from fans than they are used to. Players can't see out and nobody can see inside where they are, so they are getting privacy in that way.

We know that the NHL bubble is safe, but having a good, fun environment for the players to be in is a whole different story. The initial reviews are in, and the players like the setup so far. Montreal forward and player representative Paul Byron noted, "I was a little skeptical of the whole process before this all started: How was it going to work? How can they prepare this?...It didn't seem like they had much time, much notice. ... I'm actually pleasantly surprised coming

to the hotel. It seems like they've got a pretty good setup for us." (Leahy, NBC Sports). The amenities include food and coffee from Canadian staple Tim Hortons, a section of restaurants in Toronto and Edmonton, and transportation to and from the practice rinks and the hotels that the teams are staying at. Overall, the players are comfortable and safe within the bubble and there continues to be more negative cases throughout the league.

The league is still making an effort to keep the players safe however, and they are trying to avoid the potential outbreak among players and staff that will threaten the season to be completed. With the obvious risks involved with the season returning as it is in every sport, the NHL should still return for the fan's and the player's sakes. The fact that hockey will be going straight into the playoffs after a few exhibition games is huge as well. Playoff hockey takes the sport to a whole new level of competition and is always interesting. Sports bring people together and allow fans to experience the unthinkable, and hockey is one of the greater sports at that. Not to mention, the Stanley Cup is the most important and historic sports trophy there is, and it would be huge for fans to see it be presented to the most deserving team this year. There will not be any fans attending games just like other sports this year and next, but sports returning will help give hope to people across the country.

How does this affect society?:

A debate that has raged throughout the country lately revolves around the point that athletes are getting tested for COVID at ease, rather nurses and those on the front lines of the disease aren't getting the testing they need. Doctor Joseph Dixon had issues with getting a test even though he is at one of the highest risks for COVID, "After going through the proper channels, I was denied viral testing and had to sit out of clinical duties, unsure whether I had picked up a standard respiratory infection or whether this was mild COVID-19". Being a rich and famous celebrity or athlete should not determine your access to getting a test, especially at the volume that these athletes will be tested at. Those in poorer communities see an increased percentage of positive cases as opposed to richer communities according to a study done by Time in New York City, the epicenter of COVID. Even though the number of tests in higher income communities like Greenwich Village are more than lower income ones, the percentage of cases in those neighborhoods are pushing 80% positive. Tests across the country are becoming more and more available as each week goes by, so this debate will die down. However, NBA players entering the bubble are tested much much more than the average American has been over the last four months.

Researcher and professor David Rowe researches how the lack of sports during the COVID pandemic has affected the United States society in his article *Subjecting pandemic sport to a sociological procedure*. Rowe compares the lack of sports to a virus, as if it became evident that a large population of the United States enjoys and needs live sports. Rowe says that "As the physical practice of sport spread across the globe, its cultural visibility mushroomed with the media, especially television, through textbook, virus-like exponential growth." (Rowe p. 7). As

sports has become a part of American culture, Rowe compares the loss of culture to a virus, as many people have to accustom the a new life many have not lived in, a life without sports. Sports has a unique presentation to fans, and sports can not be completely repeated, which gives appeal to fans to watch as many sports events as possible. Each game will only be live once, and the experience of watching a recording of a game is not as satisfying for many fans. Rowe states that “Covid-19 exposed the inner workings of sport as a machine that could be disabled by its own global interdependency ... but sport is unusually dependent on commercial media-financed, impossible-to-repeat live events performed before large co-present crowds that form a key part of the spectacle for the many times larger distant audiences using an expanding range of screens.” (Rowe p.1). While many tourist attractions will be unchanged over the years, no sports game is completely the same to another. The fear of missing out on a monumental live moment forever compels fans to watch sports and include their viewing of games as a part of their culture. The lack of these moments has left fans itching for the return of sports, the return of live once in a lifetime moments. The lack of sports can hurt people's morale, and “the pain of sport’s drug-like withdrawal, it was semi-seriously observed, could only be alleviated by a live TV sport ‘fix’. This craving might even entail resort to obscure sport events in parts of the globe where lockdowns were not enforced” (Rowe p.16). While there has not been a safe cure to bring back sports, the need and cry from fans has played a role in many sports leagues returning and restarting. The NBA and NHL will bring fans playoff games in a matter of weeks, bring high intensity games and unforgettable moments in a new, unprecedented environment never seen before, and possibly never seen again. The return of sports will bring a cure to sports withdrawal, but will it come at a high risk factor in the COVID era is a question often unconsidered.

Sports doctor for the University of Washington Jon Drezner looks into the risks athletes are making by playing sports, and considers precautions that should be taken to help try to prevent a further outbreak of the COVID virus. For student athletes, not only do they have to worry about their sports life, they also have their academic obligations, which can often be of higher priority than their performance on the field. Drezner argues that “schools should consider a daily tracking tool to confirm student-athletes are appropriately self-monitoring and have not developed symptoms of COVID-19. In addition, it is suggested that schools establish a COVID-19 response team to help develop and implement policies and procedures for a safe return to sport in their school and to assist in COVID-19 symptom screening, reporting, and contact tracing.” (Drezner p.1). While it may be difficult and costly to maintain tracking, that may be what is needed to have the safest sports environment possible in the near future. Being aware of a student's whereabouts would be beneficial to not only protect the student athlete, but also protect the athletes and other people the student may expose himself to. Establishing policies with potential ramifications for violations should motivate students to remain safe while also keeping the schools safe. While these procedures may help prevent the spread of the virus, there may not be a way to totally prevent the spread of the virus. Drezner suggests that “student-athletes who test positive for COVID-19 with or without symptoms should be isolated per public health guidelines. No exercise is recommended for at least 14 days from diagnosis and 7 days after all symptoms have resolved.” Having players quarantine will be the best way to attempt to prevent a spread once a player catches the virus. In addition, keeping a student away from the large population for as long as possible after catching the virus will help make the school and sports environment as safe as possible. For many student athletes, sports make up a

large part of their lives in many different ways. Having the exercise, enjoyment, and collaboration with others among other benefits of sports will help athletes return to a normal lifestyle. The precautions stated by Drezner will hopefully lead to a smooth transition to a new era of sports.

In *A sociology of the Covid-19 pandemic: A commentary and research agenda for sociologists*, Paul Ward creates his own piece of art and provides analysis and comparisons of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected us as a society. He talks about waking up on Good Friday 2020 which was about the time of the curve rising. On that day, he finished a book called *Existentialism and Humanism* by Jean-Paul Sartre. The book talks about how, “existentialism is founded on the key idea that *existence comes before essence* – humans exist first and then create meaning afterwards, in an ongoing project” (Ward, 2020). This book and quote shows us the perfect themes for this pandemic. When we were all stuck inside our homes for months, we didn’t know what to think. We watched the news updating us on the cases and deaths, with no sports to watch and life just went to a standstill. People across the world could not even fathom what was going on, as history was happening before our very eyes and we have truly never seen anything like what has gone on in the last 5 months. As we started to get out of our homes, we then started to “create meaning” for what we just went through. Americans realized that with 150,000 (and counting) fewer people we have with us, the impact is other-worldly. We have seen our frontline doctors and nurses as well as volunteers put in countless hours to help everyone they can, even though working in these conditions during the pandemic is extremely dangerous for them and their families.

Conclusion:

All things considered, we believe that in the specific cases of the NBA and NHL that a restart to finish is justifiable based on the risk and reward. The bubbles of these two leagues ensure that the virus is not spread outside of the bubble, and players are safe from the spread of COVID in the outside world. The restart of the NBA and NHL will help the leagues and their players recuperate what money they have already lost when the season was suspended through TV deals and playoff revenue. The restart is great for ESPN and Disney as well, as the NBA is utilizing a space that would be vacant right now because of COVID. Bringing back sports under these specific circumstances is justifiable, as it brings back a part of society that was lost and missed, while keeping the players and staff as safe as possible during the uncertainty going on around the world.

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