

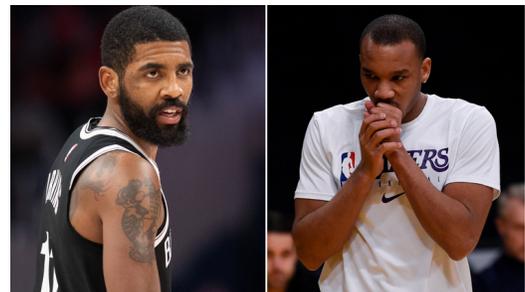
THE SPORTIER

Baseball, Finally Back

On Tuesday of the past week, the sports world may have been saved. After nearly three months of tireless and stagnant negotiations between the MLB owners and the MLB Players Association, both sides came to an agreement with the help of MLB Commissioner Robert Manfred. This deal was essentially the one proposed by the owners two weeks ago, one that included a 60-game regular season. Along with the 60-game season set to begin on July 23 or 24, with players reporting to training camps at their home parks on July 1, the two main factors that were needed to be agreed upon were both the lengthy safety rules and the pro-rated contracts that players were set to receive due to the MLB's collective bargaining agreement from March of this year. Since the season will be shortened and may have less value because of it, the MLB has implemented two experimental changes to the game: 1) the National League will have a Designated Hitter batting instead of the pitcher in the batting order, and 2) in extra innings, teams will automatically start with a runner on second base. The biggest controversial change in baseball in recent memory may be the removal of the Designated Hitter in the National League. Traditionally, the National League has batted a pitcher in the lineup, which some may seem like an automatic out which makes the game less exciting. Baseball purists, however, feel that it forces strategy in the game of baseball, one foundational piece that baseball was built on. Since the American League is usually referred to the better hitting league in large part due to the fact of specialized hitters, this rule can add parity to the MLB. Regarding COVID-19 illnesses, players with the virus will be placed on a special injured list, and will not be permitted to return until two negative tests are confirmed. The last significant addition to the league is a taxi squad of approximately 20 additional players beyond the regular roster. These players would be available to the team after a simple phone call, as these players would travel with the team and would be able to play on short notice if needed. This could allow highly touted prospects from the minor leagues to receive significant playing time, and could potentially set a new standard that would accelerate minor leaguers to the MLB stage. Though the MLB was able to make it through the tough negotiations, it may seem that progress may be halted. Recently, there have been increased COVID-19 cases in 15 of the 27 MLB markets, most notably in Phoenix and Houston. With cities such as San Diego and Miami reporting more and more cases, some people are being forced back into a quarantine-like life. As unfortunate as it is, after all of the negotiations that have been made, the MLB may lose out to the government if the situation regarding the virus becomes too severe. As of right now, Opening Day 2020 in July is set to start off with a clash of the World Series Champion Washington Nationals and the New York Yankees. Unfortunately, even after the countless negotiations, the season still is not guaranteed.

NBA: Progress or Setback?

The NBA has made much progress over the past week, but they have seen consistent setbacks. The most exciting news in the realm of basketball is that the NBA schedule for the season, which seemed to be in jeopardy just a week ago, was finally confirmed. The season, located at Disney World in Orlando, will start off with a bang on July 30, showcasing the classic Lakers-Clippers rivalry on National TV. The season will last from July 30 until August 14, at which point seeding for the playoffs will be determined. The top seven seeds in each conference will be a lock in the playoffs after August 14, and if the No. 9 seeded team is less than four games behind from the No. 8 seeded team, they will have a play-in game for the last spot. A final rule that has been set in place is that players choosing to sit out the remainder of the season will still receive the benefits of their contract. While this is very promising news for sports in general, continued pressures from players is holding back the restart. A group led by Kyrie Irving and Avery Bradley, two players who plan to not play with their playoff-contending teams in the remainder of the modified season, have urged players to consider the bigger picture. This group wants to combat social injustices that have been more and more prevalent in the African-American community. They believe that "this is not about individual players, athletes or entertainers. This is about our group of strong men and women uniting for change." Along with numerous players sitting out to fight for a larger cause, an already present issue has made itself more visible: COVID-19. Though many had thought that the virus had slowed its pace, it has not. On Tuesday of the past week, the Florida Department of Health announced that the state had surpassed 100,000 COVID-19 cases, a frightening milestone. In the state, an unfortunate 12% positive test rate has been the result of the United States' slight awakening from hibernation. Zach Binney, epidemiologist at Emory University, called the clash of the NBA and COVID-19 "really, really, worrying." Though he notes that the NBA has good intentions as to why they need to play the remainder of their games, he also considers that it may be seen as wrong to transport 1,000+ athletes and staff to a hotbed for the virus, and rigorously test them while being oblivious to the fact that many more in the area are suffering. The NBA, a league that has been popularized across the globe, budding with many African-American superstars, and a league planning to enter a COVID-19 hotspot, have an important, even revolutionary decision to make: Will the NBA sway in the direction to contribute to the world's current issues, or will they continue the season for millions of eyes to watch?



Nets guard Kyrie Irving (left) and Lakers guard Avery Bradley (right)

Sources: