

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

When Will Sports Come Back?

Pro sports leagues are desperate to resume play this summer, but will it be safe to do so?

Here's everything you need to know:

Source: TheWeek.com, May 3, 2020

Will games be held this year?

It's still unknown. Cooped-up fans craving the escape of sports have suffered a month of postponements: the NBA and NHL playoffs, baseball's opening day, the Masters golf tournament, college basketball's "March Madness," even the Olympics in Tokyo. As fans clamor for distraction and revenue losses mount, team owners and league officials in all the major sports are talking about playing games this summer in empty stadiums. President Trump has urged the leagues to restart games soon, and even said he wants fans packing stadiums by August. "We have to get our sports back," he said several weeks ago. "I'm tired of watching baseball games that are 14 years old." But the leagues and infectious-disease experts have ruled out large crowds, which would surely spread the coronavirus. A recent poll found that 72 percent of Americans will not attend games before there's a COVID-19 vaccine, which is likely at least a year away. Because the virus could be easily spread among players too, some owners doubt sports will return before 2021.

How much money has been lost?

American sports is roughly a \$71 billion-a-year business, and leagues will collectively lose \$10 billion by June 1, *Forbes* estimates. "Our revenue, in essence, has dropped to zero," said NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. Many ancillary businesses have taken a big hit, too: sports bars, stores selling sports apparel, sports media, casinos, and fantasy sports sites. Fans have sued to get tickets reimbursed for postponed games, and cable TV providers fear massive cancellations without the draw of live action. Basketball players, who had completed about four-fifths of their regular season, agreed to a 25 percent pay cut beginning May 15 for the duration of the shutdown. MLB players agreed to take prorated pay for whatever games are played, or 4 percent of their 2020 salaries if the season is canceled. The deal would be renegotiated, however, if games are played in empty ballparks.

How would that work?

"We don't have a plan," said MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred. "We have lots of ideas." The leading proposal is having all 30 teams confined around Phoenix, where there's an MLB stadium and 10 spring-training complexes. No fans would attend, and the league believes 3,000 people — players, team staff, umpires, TV crews — would need to be quarantined and tested regularly. Dr. Anthony Fauci, Trump's top infectious-disease adviser, endorsed the idea of pro-sports "bubbles," and the NBA — which is reopening some practice facilities for individual players to work out — explored creating one in Las Vegas, where hardwood courts could be built in hotels' massive conference rooms. The NFL is still hoping to kick off its season in September, but it, too, has considered playing games in empty venues. The NHL is working on a plan to hold its playoffs this summer in several teams' vacant arenas. Letting fans attend games is probably off the table. Using projected infection rates, statisticians at Sports Betting Dime estimate that if

Chicago's Wrigley Field drew its average attendance on June 1, asymptomatic carriers would infect 818 fans.

What are the drawbacks to playing?

Safety, above all. Plans to play games even without live audiences this summer are contingent on the overall infection rate in the U.S. dropping to a much lower level and staying there, which is no sure thing. NBA officials are assessing blood-testing devices that would yield results within minutes, so that players, referees, and team staff could be evaluated constantly. Still, with players dripping sweat and panting in one another's faces, one false negative would be disastrous. It would also be a titanic logistical challenge — and an emotional burden — to quarantine athletes and staff for months on end so they could compete in empty venues.

What about college sports?

The men's NCAA basketball tournament generates more than \$800 million per year, most of which is distributed to hundreds of college athletic departments. Insurance covered just \$270 million after the March tournament was canceled. Lost revenue has already forced colleges to eliminate some wrestling, soccer, and other teams. The fall start of the football season is said to be in jeopardy, with universities unsure they will be able to invite students back to classrooms and dorms. "Our teams are populated by students," said Big 12 Conference Commissioner Bob Bowlsby. "If universities aren't in session, there won't be any college sports."

How do pro players feel?

Some of the younger players who've yet to make much money say they're eager to return, even if it means playing in empty stadiums. But older players with families are worried about their health and months of living in a bubble. "What are you going to do with family members?" asked Los Angeles Angels star centerfielder Mike Trout, whose wife is pregnant. "We can't just be going from the field to the hotel room and not being able to do anything. I think that's pretty crazy."

Lessons from abroad

South Korea's pro baseball players took the field last week, but the beloved spring tradition featured some new rules: no fans, no spitting, and mandatory masks and gloves for everyone but the players. Baseball is also back in Taiwan. The two leagues are serving as test cases and models for countries eager to restart competition, although Taiwan and South Korea have a big advantage: Their governments' proactive responses to the pandemic kept their infection rate and number of deaths far lower than the U.S.'s. At South Korean ballgames, every player and official entering the stadium is checked by thermal cameras. So far, it's worked out, but Japan's baseball league postponed its April 24 opener after three players tested positive for COVID-19. In Taiwan, the Rakuten Monkeys baseball team tried to lighten the mood by putting "robot mannequins" and cardboard cutouts in the stands wearing jerseys and holding signs. American-born pitcher Dan Straily, now a pro in Korea, asked his stadium to play music between innings. "It was so quiet and boring," he said.

Possible Response Questions:

- What are your thoughts on the absence and return of sports? Explain.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.