

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## From the National Basketball Association to the National Hockey League: a parallel problem exists

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In light of our recent paper “Urgent wake up call for the National Basketball Association,”<sup>1</sup> we feel it is important to highlight the parallel problem that exists in the National Hockey League (NHL). The NHL has nearly identical air travel and condensed game schedules to the National Basketball Association (NBA), with players and coaches encountering similar health and well-being issues related to accumulating travel-related sleep deprivation, circadian disruption, and jet lag. In fact, the betting industry uses travel as a factor for hedging bets,<sup>2</sup> betting that tired teams do not play as well. Like the NBA, the NHL schedule consists of 82 regular-season games (41 each of home and road) and, similar to the NBA, although the fans see the players only for the length of the game, the actual day of the players starts and finishes several hours before and after the first puck drop. With early-morning skate rituals and late-night games interspersed with medical treatments, media, sponsorship, and family obligations, the typical daily schedules of NHL players lead to inconsistent sleep opportunities. Similar to the NBA, NHL stakeholders, including players and coaches, have voiced concerns about lack of sleep and fatigue.<sup>3</sup>

The travel mileage per team leading up to the Stanley Cup in the NHL is substantial, with the average miles traveled per team per season being 40,778 miles.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, unique to the NHL is the frenetic-paced life of equipment managers, who carry up to 2,770 pounds of equipment into the plane’s belly on a regular basis, staying up until 5:30 AM for unpacking bags, laundry arrangements, and helmets and jerseys carefully hooked and replaced.<sup>5</sup> Finally, frequent back-to-back scenarios (average of 13.7 per team per season) force teams to under 22 hours of recovery time between subsequent games.

In response to this strenuous schedule, in the 2013 collective bargaining agreement, the players association and NHL executives agreed on several policies that were intended to enhance rest opportunities for players.<sup>6</sup> The agreement included limiting preseason games to a maximum of 8, a minimum of 4 days off per month, and players entitled

to a minimum of 9 hours off between the time they arrive at the team hotel and the time players are obligated to report the next day. While these changes may seem modest, they reflect a growing awareness of the need to protect athletes’ ability to sleep.

In our paper,<sup>1</sup> we drew attention to the sleep issues inherent in the NBA, calling for novel interventions to address them. Our contention is that the NHL faces similar challenges, and the sleep health needs of players and team members require the same urgent attention.

### CITATION

Singh M, Bird SP, Charest J, Huyghe T, Calleja-Gonzalez J. From the National Basketball Association to the National Hockey League: a parallel problem exists. *J Clin Sleep Med*. 2021;17(4):863–864.

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