

Players' Union Approves Head Hits Rule

Written by Matthew Coller
Friday, 26 March 2010 04:43

Finally. That's the word on so many hockey people's tongues after the NHL players' union approved a ban on head shots. The new rule prohibits "lateral, back-pressure or blindside hit to an opponent where the head is targeted and/or the principal point of contact."

The executive board of the players' union voted Thursday to accept this temporary rule effective immediately.

"We believe this is the right thing to do for the game and for the safety of our players," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said in a statement. "The elimination of these types of hits should significantly reduce the number of injuries, including concussions, without adversely affecting the level of physicality in the game."

The blindside hits rule took nearly a month to get approved. Boston Bruins forward was severely injured on a hit by Penguins Matt Cooke that was eventually deemed legal. That hit and the lack of a suspension likely influenced the GMs to pen a new rule at the GM meetings in Boca Raton, Fla.

The NHLPA Competition Committee released this statement concerning the new rule:

"We have deliberated and endorsed to the NHLPA Executive Board the League's proposal to implement supplemental discipline this season for blindside hits to the head. Our Executive Board will vote on this recommendation and we will respond back to the League with a decision in the next 24-48 hours."

The rule will cover all 135 regular season games as well as the playoffs. An on-ice penalty for a head shot will be hashed-out over the summer and likely be enacted next season.

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The NHLPA's Executive Board said in a statement that they want to cooperate in making the game safer. We are encouraged by the League's recent willingness to explore on-ice rule changes as a means of reducing Player injuries and have no doubt that by working together, a safer working environment can be established for all NHLPA Members."

Other than the on-ice penalty, the only thing missing from this rule is an outline to how suspensions will be determined. When Colin Campbell, the NHL's head disciplinarian, faces his first head shots case he will set the precedent. Setting precedents, however, is something Campbell has been accused not sticking to. His inconsistency in deciding the Alex Ovechkin case most recently caused uproar.

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Matthew Coller is a staff member of the Business of Sports Network, and is a freelance writer. He can be [followed on Twitter](#)

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