

NHL Has Much to Consider with Rypien-Fan Incident

Written by Matthew Coller
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When you see the clip, you can't help but channel Al Michaels' "He did what?!?!" In the name of competition, you can slam someone into a plexiglass, bareknuckle box for awhile or even whack a guy in the leg with a stick and probably not face punishment. What you can't do is what Vancouver enforcer Rick Rypien did: physically assault a fan.

[The Associated Press](#) reported Wednesday that Rypien was suspended indefinitely pending investigation for grabbing a Minnesota fan Tuesday night in a 6-1 loss to the Wild. As you can [see in the video](#), Rypien goes after the 28-year-old fan after being assessed a double minor for roughing and a 10-minute misconduct. The NHL will hold a hearing, likely on Friday, to determine how long to keep Rypien out of play.

How long is the question the hockey community has been bouncing around for the last 24 hours or so since the incident. The problem for the NHL is precedent; it is difficult to compare this issue to the Indiana Pacers' Ron Artest jumping into the stands while guard Stephen Jackson threw punches on the court. Artest's actions caused an all-out mob scene, while Rypien's actions were isolated to one fan.

To say it wasn't as bad as the "Malice in the Palace" isn't to say it wasn't bad. Unlike the Pacers' problems, the Wild fan wasn't wild, he was simply clapping.

[TheHockeyWriters.com](#) laid out factors that head disciplinarian Colin Campbell will have to consider when suspending Rypien: 1) The fan didn't go after Rypien 2) The fan egged Rypien on after he'd just been in a physical altercation and 3) the league cannot tolerate fan-player altercations.

A few can be added to the list including the fact that Rypien doesn't have any type of record. If this was Sean Avery, he'd be on his couch for the rest of the season. Another factor is that the Canucks' general manager Mike Gillis said Rypien is a good teammate and good in the community. Rypien's management won't be able to eliminate a suspension, but it could help ensure he returns before 2011.

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Clearly Rypien broke the rules, but Campbell can't react based on the outcry. The league has to make sure Rypien and other players know the fans are off limits, while keeping in mind no one was hurt and Rypien's reaction was one of human-nature and was not in any way planned or thought out.

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