

NHL

NHL implements new rule to cut back on hits to head

NICK BLAKE
sports editor

After a sudden increase in blind-side hits to the head, the NHL has implemented a new rule to help protect players on the ice.

Debates began when the Pittsburgh Penguins' Matt Cooke cruised into the defensive zone and landed a devastating, shoulder-to-head hit on the Boston Bruins' Marc Savard on March 7.

Savard never saw the hit coming, and it gave him a grade II concussion that will force him to miss the rest of the season.

No penalty was called on the ice, and after a meeting with league officials, Cooke was not

suspended.

Seven days later in a game against the Chicago Blackhawks, the Washington Capitals' Alex Ovechkin shoved Chicago defenseman Brian Campbell from behind, head first into the end boards.

Campbell suffered a concussion, a broken collarbone and broken ribs. Ovechkin was issued a 5-minute boarding penalty, was given a game misconduct and ejected from the match.

Two days later, Ovechkin was suspended for two games because of the hit, while Cooke went unpunished.

Three days after the Ovechkin hit, the Blackhawks lost another defenseman when Ducks' defenseman James Wisniewski delivered a vicious hit

to the head of Brent Seabrook.

Wisniewski's hit was retaliatory in nature and Seabrook did not possess the puck. Seabrook was injured on the play and Wisniewski was given a 2-minute minor penalty for charging in the game.

The next day, Wisniewski was suspended for eight games without pay for the hit.

With such inconsistency regarding the penalization of hits to the head, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHL general managers held multiple meetings to come up with a solution.

On March 24, Bettman and the NHL passed a new rule, prohibiting "a lateral, back-pressure or blindside hit to an opponent where the head is targeted and/or the principal point of contact."

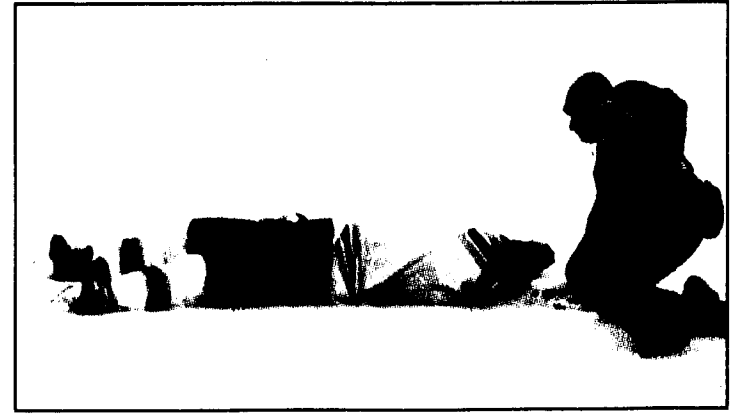
The rule took effect on March 25, and it gives the NHL Hockey Operations Department the power to review any such hit for the purpose of supplementary discipline.

Bettman said that the rule, which passed unanimously, closes the loophole for shoulder hits to the head.

Under the new rule, a penalty does not have to be called on the ice for the NHL to take disciplinary action on an infraction.

"A minor or major can't be managed properly right now," Bettman said, according to nhl.com. "We don't want to change the outcome of a game or the playoffs [with on-ice penalties, while still protecting players]."

The NHL hopes that the new



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Boston Bruin Marc Savard suffered a Grade II concussion after taking a shoulder to the head from Matt Cooke on March 7 in Pittsburgh. The NHL hopes their new rule will eliminate these hits.

rule will reduce blindside hits and hits to the head, and keep players safe while on the ice. "It is a clear statement to

players, teams and fans that we don't want these hits in the game," Bettman said. "This rule will help prevent concussions."

MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

Cinderellas take over NCAA tourney; No. 1s go down

NICK BLAKE
sports editor

This year's NCAA men's basketball tournament has been a surprise to many, providing its fair share of Cinderellas and bracket busting contests.

The bracket has been cut by more than half. There are some unexpected teams still playing, and some teams that were expected to be in are out.

One of the biggest upsets of the tournament came when the ninth seeded Northern Iowa Panthers knocked off the No. 1 seeded Kansas Jayhawks in the second round.

Northern Iowa defeated Kansas by a score of 69-67, eliminating one of the heavy favorites to win the national title.

Northern Iowa's upset made them the first team to knock out a number one seed in the second round since Alabama at Birmingham took down Kentucky in 2004.

Another major upset came back in the first round when the No. 14 Ohio Bobcats sent the No. 3 Georgetown Hoyas packing far earlier than anticipated.

The win earned Ohio their first tournament victory in 27 years, and the win came easily as they controlled the flow of play throughout the entire contest.

This year's tournament has been defined by upsets, with eight double-digit seeds making it out of the first round.

A Cinderella story of the tournament is that of the Cornell Big Red. No. 12 seed Cornell earned its first tournament win in team history when it defeated the No. 5 Temple Owls by a score of 78-65.

The victory ended a 12-game losing streak at the NCAA's for Ivy League schools, but the Big Red was not happy with a first round victory.

Cornell marched on to the second round where they thumped the fourth seeded Wisconsin Badgers by a score

of 87-69. Playing dominating basketball, the Big Red punched their ticket to the Sweet Sixteen.

The Big Red's fairy tale run was cut short in the Sweet Sixteen round with a loss to No. 1 Kentucky.

Cornell could not steal all of the attention, though, because No. 11 Washington Huskies are making a name for themselves as well.

The Huskies first round matchup came against the Marquette Golden Eagles, and

Washington won the game in the finals seconds by a score of 80-78.

Washington forward Quincy Pondexter took the final shot with the game tied at 78-78, and banked it in with 1.7 seconds remaining to send the Huskies to the second round.

Washington avoided a nail-biter in their second round game, trouncing the No. 3 New Mexico Lobos by a score of 82-64 and earned their spot in the Sweet Sixteen.

The St. Mary's (CA) Gaels

are the third double-digit ranked team to reach the Sweet Sixteen. The 10th seeded Gaels cruised to an 80-71 victory in the first round, setting up a second round matchup with the second seeded Villanova Wildcats.

Senior center Omar Samhan put the Gaels on his back and tallied 32 points and seven rebounds as St. Mary's eliminated Nova by a final of 75-68.

The upsets continued in the Sweet Sixteen round, as the No. 5 Butler Bulldogs knocked off the No. 1 seed Syracuse Orange.

Syracuse is the second No. 1 seed to go down in this year's tournament. Duke and Kentucky are the only No. 1s that remain.

With two out of four No. 1 seeds eliminated, the nation could see an unexpected champion at the end of the tournament.

Beacon Final Four Picks

Nick

Ohio State
Kentucky
Kansas State
Duke

Alec

Michigan State
Kentucky
Butler
Purdue

Connor

Tennessee
Kentucky
Butler
Duke

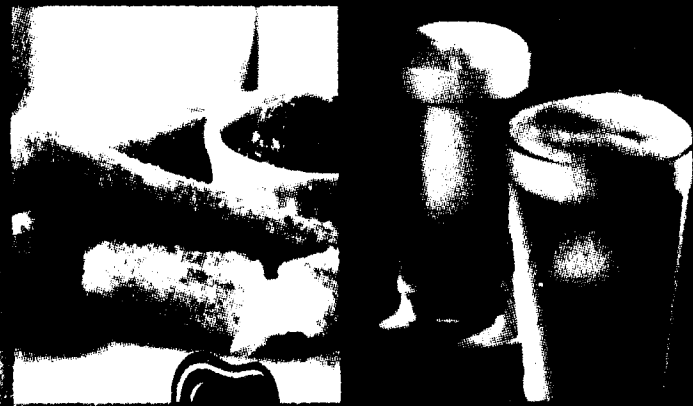
Shannon

Tennessee
Kentucky
Kansas State
Baylor

Four editors have made their Final Four predictions.

The editors' picks for the champion are shown behind the Final Four picks.

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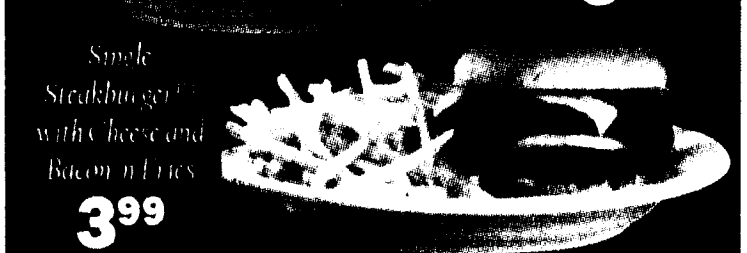
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