The seasons of three of the top four American team sports were thrown into uncertain stasis by the coronavirus pandemic, a stunning turn of events that we've been dealing with for 2.5 months now. As the weeks have passed and the country has ever-so-tentatively begun to reopen, Major League Baseball, the NHL and the NBA have all waded into the uncharted waters of resuming their seasons.

While it's not really a competition, as different aspects of those possible plans have drifted into the public sphere, it's become apparent that the tenor of conversation in baseball has been remarkably different than that of the winter sports. For one thing, more of those baseball talks have played out in the public, with management proposals frequently finding their way into the headlines and players responding to them with often harsh language in both public statements and social media blasts. The end result is at least a perception that basketball and hockey will be ready to go if and when the public health crisis allows, while the incertitudes in baseball only seem to mushroom with each passing week.

The larger context of all of this becomes more complicated seemingly by the day. The health worries stemming from the pandemic were alarming enough, and they haven't really been assuaged by the passage of time. Those worries were then exacerbated by the kind of economic strife that is all but inevitable to result from such an unprecedented freeze on so many businesses. That problem also has improved little as time has passed. Then last week, our nation fell deeper into crisis after the horrific death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, spurring coast-to-coast protests against systemic racism. Recent days have been filled with troubling violence in the streets and destruction in our neighborhoods.

All of this has served to push questions about sports further to the margin. Obviously, those questions still need to be addressed, even if the larger societal issues mark the growing discord in the MLB discussions almost absurd by comparison. At the same time, we understand we're talking about a $10 billion-per-year industry, and it's natural that everyone involved would seek to defend their interests. We also understand that we want baseball to return, and if at all possible, we'd like it to do so in a way that all of us who love the game can celebrate. We're a little jealous of the smoothness and discretion, by comparison, that seem to have characterized the talks in the winter sports.

That brings us to our central question: What is so different about baseball, as a sport and as an industry, that it seems to have split off onto a path so disparate from the ones followed by the NBA and NHL?

Factor 1: The calendar

This is a simple product of chance, yet is a huge one and looms as an undercurrent to all of the subsequent factors. While the NBA and NHL are losing a lot in terms of momentum, with their season-long playoff races halted just as they were building to the climax of two months of postseason, they at least completed enough of their schedules that starting back up in postseason mode is a viable

alternative. Baseball's season was stopped in its tracks before clubs had even departed their spring training homes.

The calendar also works against baseball in another important way. As indoor sports, environmental and climatic conditions are irrelevant to the NHL and NBA, though the enclosed venues of those sports do give rise to an area of concern regarding coronavirus that doesn't affect baseball to the same degree. However, baseball is traditionally a six-month marathon in which 162 games sort out the wheat from the chaff, setting up a postseason that runs for just a month, but even so typically finishes barely in time before the onset of autumn renders the prospect playing in some markets hard to pull off.

So baseball has two overarching problems: Playing enough of a regular season to legitimize a playoff bracket, while completing the season in time to avoid World Series snowouts. Of course, playing out the postseason in warm-weather neutral sites is a possibility. But that's less than ideal for the markets that would lose the chance to host what would be a major civic event. In this way, the calendar serves as an hourglass for baseball's 2020 hopes in a way that it does not for the winter sports. (Editor's note: And with the calendar very much in mind, MLB is reportedly mulling a proposal to the players for a 50-game regular season.)

Factor 2: Economic structure

Even if the NHL and NBA had not already completed most of their regular seasons before the shutdown, they would still have been farther down the road than MLB in the area of player compensation. Why? The salary cap. The winter sports have one, and baseball does not, depending on how one views MLB's luxury tax system.

Because salary-cap levels are tied to revenue, negotiations to adjust compensation based on sudden changes in teams' income are more straightforward. It's not entirely that simple -- salary caps are set before a season, based on the previous season's revenue -- but the labor and management sides in those sports are accustomed to dealing through this paradigm. The NHL's collective bargaining agreement contains a provision to adjust salaries in the event of a revenue shortfall or because of a force majeure event. The NBA's CBA contains a similar provision, and with that in mind, players agreed to have 25% of salaries withheld while both sides await the outcome of the pandemic. Players could still receive that money if revenue doesn't fall as anticipated.

In any event, the seasons in the winter sports were far enough along that salary considerations have been secondary to issues around health and safety, as well as competitive structures. That's not to say that there won't be revenue fallout in the winter sports, as money lost this season will factor into future salary-cap calculations and impact near-term cash flow, just to cite a couple of complications. It's more

to say that the labor and management sides in the NHL and NBA appear to have been able to shove those concerns to the side for the time being.

In baseball, not only is compensation divorced from a direct relationship to revenue in the economic structures of the sport, but there is a long-standing ideological revulsion to the concept on the part of the MLB Players Association. That paints any sort of proposal from the owners that bases salary on revenue as taboo, even if it's a temporary measure put in place because of a historic anomaly. That makes attempts by owners to point to revenue shortfalls as justification for compensation reductions a wee bit more complicated.

Also, to reiterate, baseball is dealing with how to adjust to a full season of lost revenue streams; the NHL and NBA are not. The scale of baseball's problem is exponentially greater than that of the NHL and NBA.