

# Cannabis and Health

Module 14: Sports, Exercise, and Recovery

Lecture 4: Cannabis and Professional Sports

# Professional Sports

SPORTS

## As More States Legalize Marijuana Use, NFL Wrestles With Whether They Should Too

February 2, 2019 · 8:06 AM ET

Heard on [Weekend Edition Saturday](#)

### **Should marijuana really be banned from the Olympics?**

The list of substances banned from Olympic competition is staggering. Marijuana is on the list, but derivative cannabinoids aren't. What's going on, and should marijuana even be banned?

## Wellness

### **Why Nate Diaz And Other MMA Fighters Use Cannabis**

James McClure

Aug 23, 2016

# Cannabis and Sports

- As we have outlined, there seems to be potential for cannabis to have the potential to aid in recovery from physical activity
- In addition, there are some data suggesting that cannabis might be neuroprotective
- Studies with animal models suggest cannabinoids might even provide some protection from negative consequences associated with repeated jarring (like tackling) in sports
  - Alzheimer's, ALS, dementia, concussion (brain injury)

# National Football League

- Currently NFL players who have two positive tests for THC can be suspended
- But NFL players experience tremendous pain and soreness
  - Many turn to opioid pain relief
- NFL players are also subject to repeated jarring and negative neurocognitive consequences
  - Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE)
- Thus, the NFL players association has pressured the NFL to ease restrictions

# National Football League

- ESPN conducted a survey of NFL players in 2016 (n=266)
  - 61% percent of those surveyed agreed that players would take fewer opiates if they could use cannabis
  - 71% agreed that cannabis should be legal in all states
- Disconnect between what policies of the league and the feelings of the players

# NFL changing their policy?

- As reported by the Boulder Weekly in March of 2019, it appears that the NFL “is finally ready to chill, at least when it comes to cannabis.”
- As part of their collective bargaining agreement that is up for renewal in 2021, there are signs that the NFL may ease restrictions

# MLB and NBA

- Major League Baseball is relatively lenient
  - MLB player's union has been opposed to harsh punishment for cannabis use since 2002.
  - Testing positive for more than 50 ng/ml in urine results in a fine and treatment
  - No suspension unless they violate treatment
- National Basketball Association used to have rules similar to MLB, however...

## **Big Marijuana Reforms Likely in NBA, Commissioner Silver Suggests**

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver gave an impassioned response when confronted by a podcast host on the league's marijuana policy.

By [Jimi Devine](#) 

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Published on December 19, 2018

# Player Travel and Cannabis

- Some commissioners/owners are relatively positive concerning players use of cannabis, but worry that it could be problematic if a player travels from a state where cannabis is legal to a state where it is not legal
- A player could be arrested for something that was legal in the prior state in which they played



# The case of the National Hockey League



- The NHL does routinely test randomly selected players and THC is on the prohibited list, however
  - Test results are confidential unless they are related to specific player problems
  - It is not designated a performance enhancing drug
  - Players are not suspended for use
- NHL was always less strict than other organizations, and many of the teams in the NHL are based in Canada, which has legalized cannabis at the national level

# Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)

- Soccer is arguably the most popular sport internationally
- While THC use is banned, CBD use is legal
- Perhaps because of the FIFA stance, Major League Soccer is relatively lenient in comparison to other sports
  - Policy is vague...it prohibits “controlled substances” but doesn’t mention marijuana
  - If players test positive and agree to get treatment, there are no sanctions




# Back to WADA



[Home](#) / [What is Prohibited](#)

## PROHIBITED IN-COMPETITION

English 

### Substances

S6 Stimulants

S7 Narcotics

S8 Cannabinoids

S9 Glucocorticoids

### CANNABINOIDS

If a Substance or Method is not defined in this list, please verify with your Anti-Doping Organization

The following cannabinoids are prohibited:

- Natural cannabinoids, e.g. cannabis, hashish and marijuana,
- Synthetic cannabinoids e.g. D9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and other cannabimimetics.

Except:

- Cannabidiol.

In September 2017,  
WADA removed CBD  
from the banned  
substances list

# Why is THC still banned?

- For the World Anti-Doping Agency, a substance should be banned if:
  - It has the potential to enhance or enhances sport performance.
  - It represents an actual or potential health risk to the athlete.
  - It violates the spirit of sport.
- THC does not seem to enhance sport performance, however...
  - the data are not entirely conclusive regarding health risk
  - opinions differ regarding violation of the “spirit of sport”

# Times are changing

- Although THC remains a banned substance in the details are informative and suggestive of where things are headed
- The level of allowable THC in urine for the Olympics was raised to 150 ng/ml
- Some argue this essentially translates to “smoke all you want, just not during competition.”

# Summary

- Currently cannabis is banned in most sports
  - Some sports allow CBD
  - Rules are somewhat lenient
  - Some associated with pro sports argue that alcohol and tobacco are legal, and are perhaps more dangerous than cannabis, so cannabis should be legal as well
- Barriers exist
  - Different laws in different states – puts players in potential legal jeopardy
- Perhaps the best evidence for use in sport, as with other forms of exercise, is for aiding in recovery
  - Lessens inflammation and pain, anti-anxiety, better sleep and possible neuroprotective effects