# 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. Whats going on, and should marijuana even be banned?

#### Wellness

# Why Nate Diaz And Other MMA Fighters Use Cannabis

# 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.

# 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

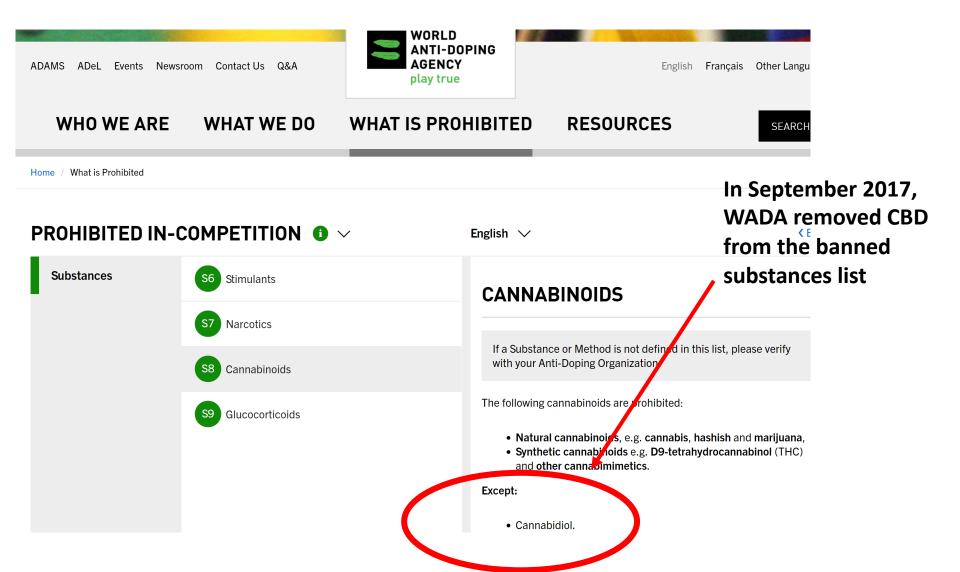
# Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)

- 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



# 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