Protective Gear Equals Safety In The NHL Essay, Research Paper

PROTECTIVE GEAR EQUALS SAFETY IN THE NHL

The NHL should force their players to wear protective gear. Three reasons why protective gear should be worn are: one, it would prevent physical injuries; two, the players would set a good example for the future generations; three, it would take away from the negative aspects of the game. Protective gear helps a somewhat violent game remain as clean as possible.

Wearing protective gear would prevent physical injuries in hockey. There were many hockey players who have worked hard all of their lives to become professional hockey superstars and when they finally got to the NHL, they become injured and were forced to watch the game instead of playing in it. An example of this is Brett Lindros. At the age of sixteen, the New York Islanders drafted Brett in the first round of the entry draft. He played his first NHL game against the Buffalo Sabers when he was eighteen years old. One year later, on February ninth, his whole life came crashing down on him. His lifelong dream to win a Stanley Cup had come to an end. He was hit with a thundering bodycheck into the boards and was knocked unconscious. Soon it was discovered that Brett had a history of concussions that dated back to when he was sixteen years old. The collision forced him to retire at the age of nineteen and spend the rest of his life pondering what was now the fact that he would have to quit in order to live. What actually happened was, when he was hit against the boards, his head hit the glass and that impact forced him to collapse and fall to the ice. He was immediately taken to the emergency room and there the doctors said that they could not examine the severity of the injury so soon. The severity of a concussion depends strictly on how much force is applied to the head and whether it is a head-on or a glancing

blow.1 The following week, doctors told him that he had to stop playing hockey because the

concussion was very severe and there was no way that he could regain his health and play hockey. This gruesome injury could have been avoided if Brett was wearing an approved helmet. The helmet that he was wearing at the time of the injury had no foam on the inside. That foam helps

absorb the impact of a blow to the head. If he had been wearing one, there would have been a huge chance that he could have left the ice with only a mild injury instead of a career ending one. Another example is Brian Berard. His whole career came to an end on March the eleventh when he was playing against the Ottawa Senators. Marian Hossa was taking a slapshot and Berard fell to the ice to block the shot. When the puck was shot, the end of Hossa?s stick struck Berard in his eye. The blow caused a 20-millimeter cut across the eyeball, detached the retina, sliced off the lens, and caused other problems.2 Brian Berard is only twenty-two years old and is forced to finish his career because of his health. All of which could have been avoided if he had been wearing a visor on his helmet. If he had been wearing a visor, Hossa?s stick would have just bounced off the plastic and Berard would still have blocked the shot. It?s very sad to think of all the good people who have been injured while playing this very physical sport of hockey. It is even more heartbreaking to think about all of those whose injuries that could have been avoided if they had just had the proper protection. Brett?s older brother Eric Lindros defines this best. There is no player more valuable to his team than Eric is to the Philadelphia Flyers. But on December fourteenth, his career came to a halt when he was hit with a painful elbow to his head. He was playing against the Florida Panthers when Alex Hicks elbowed him in his face. He got a ten-

1 Levy Allan, Sports Injury Handbook (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1985), 49.

2 Ormsby Mary, ?Berard Set For Surgery On Eye?, Toronto Star, 21 Mar. 2000, D6.

minute major and suspended for 6 games, but the damage had already been done. Eric Lindros had

his most severe concussion. He was unconscious for twelve minutes and when the doctors examined him a few days later, they concluded that he had postconcussion syndrome. Postconcussion syndrome is when a patient experience symptoms such as headache, dizziness, loss

of memory, of the event fatigue, and general weakness. For some people, these symptoms clear up and they feel fine, but the symptoms recur when they become active again.3 Even though Eric had no control over the situation that occurred, if he had been wearing a cage on his helmet, the blow would not have been so severe. Eric will return to playing hockey next season and has told the press that he is thinking about wearing a visor for protection. The game of hockey is one of the most brutal sports in the world. Players who don?t wear the proper protection are leaving themselvers open for injuries. It is better to be safe than to be sorry.

Players who wear approved equipment set a good example for the future generation of hockey players. An example of players setting good examples for children is, if the players of the NHL continue to wear protective equipment, the children watching them will grow up not fearing injuries when they play hockey. Michael Landsburg states, ?If the league forces players to wear helmets, they will maintain the stars they have now and the upcoming generations won?t have to worry about concussions or other related injuries.?4 He is stating that if the NHL makes it mandatory for their players to wear helmets, most of the players in the game today will be injury free. He is also saying that if helmets become mandatory many of the injuries that exist in the NHL will become extinct, such as Postconcussion Syndrome and other head injuries. Also, he states that

3Levy, Allan. Sports Injury Handbook (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1985), 50.

4Off The Record, TSN, 14 May 2000.

in the future there will be no fear of injuries among youth. Nowadays, when the children read the

newspaper they always read about some hockey player who has been injured. If the league enforces the use of approved equipment, the kids will hardly ever read about injuries on the ice and therefore they won?t have a fear in the back of their heads when playing hockey. When the children play hockey in the minor leagues they are forced to wear approved gear. So, if the NHL creates the same rule, these kids will find it easier to adapt to professional hockey when they are drafted because they are already used to wearing the equipment. Another example of players setting a good example for the future generation of hockey players is Pavel Bure. Pavel Bure is a role model who wears a visor and kids want to play hockey just like him. When children watch their favourite hockey players play hockey wearing protective equipment, the children tend to mimic the behavior of the players and therefore wear protective equipment themselves while playing hockey. Pavel Bure sets a great example by wearing the visor because he is showing the children that you can be a superstar and you can be safe at the same time. Pavel Bure leads the Florida Panthers in goals and points and is easily the most important asset that the Panthers have. If he becomes injured during the season, his team would have no chance of becoming champions. He also makes it a habit to show the kids that safety is an important issue when playing hockey and they should not overlook it at all. He appears in numerous fundraisers that help kids learn about hockey and safety. When asked by reporters why he feels that wearing visors should be mandatory, he said, ?They should be mandatory because they stop injuries from occurring and if the kids watch us not wearing them, they won?t wear visors either and there is no telling how many hockey related injuries there will be.?5 He is saying that there is more physical play in major

5 Schultz, Randy. ?Bure is on a hot streak.? Sports Illustrated, 19 February 1997: 21-22.

hockey and consequently protective gear is necessary. Therefore, if you aren?t wearing the proper equipment, you have a fairly good chance of getting injured. Bure is trying to be a role model for these kids and when they watch him play hockey they try to be just like him. He wears a visor to show them that there is a big reason for caring for your health. A kid can have all the talent in the world but it would make no difference to his team if he is in the hospital. Another example of professionals who wear protective gear setting good examples for the future generation is Joe Juneau. He wears a visor on his helmet and thereby lets the children know by example, the importance of safety in all aspects of their lives. He was the guest speaker for the Etobicoke Junior Hockey League back in ninety-five and he is a great role model. Juneau stated, ?If you make it a habit now, you will always remember to wear a seatbelt while driving and you will always remember to wear safety boots while working and you will think about safety while doing almost any job.?6 He is saying that if a child makes it a habit to wear all of his equipment every time he plays hockey then that same habit will be transferred over to any other job that the child does. I feel that both Pavel Bure and Joe Juneau are excellent examples of role models and there should be more players like them.

Wearing protective gear brings a more positive atmosphere to the game of hockey. Pat Quin, Mike Gartner, and Pat Burns prove that protective gear brings a more positive atmosphere to the game. Pat Quin is one of the leagues most respected coachs. He has been the coach of two very successful teams, the Vancouver Canucks and the Toronto Maple Leafs. During his twelve years in the league, he has played a significant role in the development of his teams.

6 Sullivan, Matt. ?Joe Juneau shows kids how to be safe.? Sports Illustrated, 4 March 1991: 33-34.

Quin states, ?If this rule is enforced, the league will become less brutal and more action packed.?7 He is saying that he is in favour of the rule where the NHL should force their players to wear protective gear and if the rule becomes enforced, the game would become less violent thus bringing a more positive atmosphere to the game of hockey. Mike Gartner is another person who can prove that protective gear brings a positive atmosphere to the game of hockey. He has been in the league for fourteen years and has seen some of the most brutal hits and injuries in the game. He always wears a visor and he recommends it to anyone involved in hockey. Gartner said, ?when you wear a visor, there is nothing else on your mind other than playing the best hockey that you possibly can.?8 He is saying that when a player wears a visor, he remains focused on the game and doesn?t have to worry about severe injuries. When players remain focused they tend to play with raw emotions which bring a more positive atmosphere to the game. Finally, Pat Burns proves that wearing protective gear brings a more positive atmosphere to hockey. He is a coach that has been in the league for seven years. He has coached numerous teams such as the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Boston Bruins. He has broken almost all the records as a coach such as most wins, ties, and most times coaching the Stanley Cup champions. He is well respected around the league and gets the attention of almost everyone he talks to. Burns states, ?when the players wear their equipment throughout the season, most of the time they remain healthy throughout the season.?9 What he means is that the fans of the league who work their nine-to-five jobs for their fixed salaries get the satisfaction of knowing that their favourite player will be in the lineup instead of on the bench with an injury. When the superstars in the league are always healthy the seats in the stands get filled

7 Lang, Brian. ?Pat Quin votes to enforce?, The National Post 14 March 2000. D4.

8 Jennings, Peter. ?Profile: Gartner?, The Hockey News 7 February 1998. 42.

9 Jennings, Peter. ?Profile: Burns?, The Hockey News 7 February 1998. 46.

Pretty fast and therefore brings a more positive atmosphere to the game of hockey.

Protective gear is used as the ultimate form of safety for all players. Everyone associated with the sport of hockey merits from the use of protective gear. Protective gear is safe, effective and reliable. The players in the NHL should wear protective gear.

1. Gray, William. Youth and Injuries. New York: Giffen Inc. 1990.

2. Levy, Allan. Sports Injury Handbook. Toronto: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1985.

3. Wright, Paul. Sports and Medicine. Washington: Arista Press. 1989.