



Summer Ball

By: Austin Rader

June 21, 2020 — It's been over 100 days since life as we knew it changed. The economy has turned into a recession, and arguably a depression. Rob Manfred's poor leadership has jeopardized Major League Baseball having a season this year. Come fall, there may not even be fans in the stands if football happens.

But one thing is for certain.

On July 31st, the NBA will be back. Just in time...when most fans are at camp or enjoying other "summer activities."

In a normal year, late July and most of August are known as the "dead period" in sports. The pennant races in baseball have yet to catch casual fans attention and fall camp hasn't really begun for college and professional football teams.

Stephen A. Smith and Max Kellerman have nothing to talk about on First Take. OK, maybe baseball trade deadline nonsense about a relief pitcher to bolster the bullpen, or who will back up Tom Brady this year.

I went to summer camp for eleven years. It was always during this "dead period in sports." There's a feeling in the air when you're away from your everyday life. There's something about being in the middle of nowhere with your close friends and having a good time.

You're in a bubble. The stories I have from when I was a teenager are some that I still tell people to this day.

For the NBA this summer, it's happening in Orlando, and it's going to feel like being at summer camp for these guys. (Can you imagine having Coach Popovich as your counselor??).

Have you ever been to a summer basketball camp before? For me personally, I went to a basketball camp at the University of Missouri in the summer of 2011 and 2012. It was a weeklong sleep-away camp and was my first time staying on a college campus.

When I got there, I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that I would be playing basketball for 12 hours a day. Within the first hour of being there, I ran into guys that I played against throughout my middle school basketball season.

They put us into teams, and we stuck with our teams throughout the entirety of the camp.

The coaches at the camp were some of the most well respected high school coaches in the state. The mornings were spent running drills and we played games in the afternoon and at night.

The last day of the camp was a single elimination tournament. Parents would come to the games and talk to the coaches about their kids progress.



Obviously the NBA going to Disney World to cap off the season is more of a business trip than going to camp. But it does display similar aspects. They don't go home after each game, they go back to their cabin, I mean a five-star hotel. They can go watch other teams games, or enjoy the park in their free time. Their coaches are like their counselors (and in a players driven league, they don't listen to their coaches very much, just like kids at camp).

The family members of the players will also be allowed to attend games. I'm sure Adam Silver will let former players come down to attend as well.

COVID-19 is the worst virus to hit America in my lifetime. In 2009, when I was at summer camp, the swine flu hit and they tested everyone's temperature before every meal, every day, for the entire month. I'm sure they will have the same thing in Orlando.

Being in a "camp-like" environment gives you time to have perspective on your life. Your goals, dreams, fears. You build deeper connections with your friends. Days feel like weeks. Living in the moment is the least of your worries. I'm sure this is going to happen for the NBA players too.

Now I know some players are considered sitting out. They should do what they think is right. I don't think anyone should judge someone for a decision they make during this time. The

“Black Lives Matter” movement is bigger than basketball, and if they feel that they can make a bigger impact by not playing, then I believe no one should be mad at them.

But for the guys playing, it’s going to feel like “summer camp.” They’re going to light a fire inside the NBA. The entire world will be tuned in. All eyes will be on Disney World.

During a typical regular season and postseason, NBA players travel with their posse, and are shielded from everyone else. They only see their own teammates. This summer, all NBA players will be hunkered down together in the “bubble.” Imagine having the entire NBA league all in the camp mess hall at the same time. The stories, new friendships, the conversations late at night. This will definitely create new rivalries too.

The games will likely have a “summer camp” feel to it too. I bet the players will play more loosely, much like they do in the annual all-star game. Lots of dunks, alley oops, and crazy three point attempts. They’ll be some “summertime goofing around” until the real playoffs begin.

And if your team loses, and you get sent home from the Orlando bubble, it will feel like one of your bunkmates getting sent home early because he has pneumonia....wait, that actually happened to me one summer.

I bet this will have a big impact on the league even after summer camp 2020 is over. One of the big changes in the league has been players forming their own teams - LeBron, Wade, and Bosh - for instance. Summer ball in Orlando will likely create new connections and possibly several new teammate combinations too.

Normally, the guys in the league play pick-up games throughout the summer. They invite celebrities to run with them and ESPN and House of Highlights post videos of the games on their social media accounts. This summer’s games will feel very much like that. There is going to be an element of fun, less structure, new friendships, less rules, etc. Just like camp.



The last night of camp sitting around the bonfire, listening to someone play guitar, and telling jokes about the summer will be “made for TV.” I can already see Adam Silver walking in the center of the circle around the fire to hand out the trophy to this summer’s Finals MVP.

Wish I was going back to summer camp like the NBA will this summer!