

North American pro sports leagues in a twitter over tweeting

Steve Keating, Reuters

CW note: *It's kind of hard for hockey players to Twitter while wearing gloves.*

TORONTO (Reuters) – North America's professional sports leagues are all a twitter over tweeting and have pushed through guidelines to ban player access to social networking sites during games.

Following the lead of the NFL and NBA, the NHL said it was close to making recommendations that will prohibit players from using communicational devices for social media activity -- including Twitter and Facebook -- 30 minutes before and after games, practices, meetings and media access periods.

The ban would extend to coaches, trainers and all game-related personnel.

"I looked at what the NBA was doing and what the NFL was doing and used those as a basis for my own recommendations," NHL director of social media marketing Mike Dilorenzo told Reuters on Thursday.

"We've drafted a set of guidelines that are in the process of being vetted by the senior management so they can be rolled out to the teams."

The NBA sent a memo to teams on Wednesday informing them that coaches, players and other basketball operations personnel would be forbidden from accessing social media sites from 45 minutes before tipoff until after the post-game media availability.

The Miami Heat and the Toronto Raptors are among a number of NBA teams that have been even tougher on tweeters.

Raptors head coach Jay Triano has banned the use of smartphones and laptops from practice, including all management staff and media. Even general manager Bryan Colangelo is required to leave the facility to respond to text messages.

MEDIA PLATFORMS

The NFL, which zealously protects its on-field product, was the first of North America's big four professional sports leagues to put a twitter policy in place, banning players from using social media platforms from 90 minutes before kickoff.

Major League Baseball (MLB) has no specific guidelines but pointed to a longstanding policy regarding communicational devices that prohibits their use 30 minutes before the start of a game.

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The attempt by the leagues to gain control over the Twitter phenomenon comes after a number of controversial tweets.

While coaches worry reckless tweets may provide inspirational bulletin board material for opposing teams, leagues are working to protect broadcast rights holders from tweeters getting too close to play-by-play.

Buffalo Bills wide receiver Terrell Owens has engaged in a couple of explosive twitter feuds this season involving former Dallas Cowboys team mate Tony Romo and Rodney Harrison.

Earlier this season little-known Washington Redskins backup linebacker Robert Henson labeled booing fans "dim-wits" before apologizing and shutting down his Twitter account.

"The culture in our dressing rooms, I don't think, is conducive for someone stepping out of line with these things," said Diloranzo.

"I just completed a round of interviews with 17 players who almost to a man don't use Twitter and two of 17 said they once had a Facebook page but no longer.

"I just don't think it is in the DNA of our players. In their minds they don't consider this marketing but self promotional," he added.

(Additional reporting by Steve Ginsburg in Washington, editing by Tony Jimenez.

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