

MLB delays opening day at least 2 weeks because of virus

By RONALD BLUM
AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK — Baltimore slugger Chris Davis was driving down Florida’s west coast on Interstate 75 from Sarasota to Fort Myers for an exhibition game against the Minnesota Twins when he got the call.

No game tonight. No games for a while.

“Pretty shocked,” Davis said, “just how quickly things have escalated.”

Major League Baseball delayed the start of its season by at least two weeks because of the coronavirus outbreak and suspended the rest of its spring training schedule.

Opening day had been scheduled for March 26. The decision announced by Commissioner Rob Manfred on Thursday left open whether each team would still play 162 games.

“It’s unfortunate but I think it’s the proper measure we need to take now given the situation the country’s in and the world’s in,” New York Yankees slugger Giancarlo Stanton said. “It’s important to know that some things are bigger than baseball, bigger than sports at the moment. Once we’re able to hopefully get a hold on some things and get some questions answered we can figure out when things can continue.”

The announcement came while some spring training games in Florida were still in progress. MLB followed



Minnesota Twins catcher Mitch Garver talks on his phone in an empty Hammond Stadium on Thursday in Fort Myers, Fla.

AP Photo/Elise Amendola

the NBA, NHL, MLS and college basketball tournaments in altering schedules because of the pandemic.

The minor league baseball season, which was to start April 9, also will be delayed along with qualifying in Arizona for this year’s Olympic baseball tournament and for next year’s World Baseball Classic.

“We’re ultimately all people. We all love the game of baseball, but this is a far bigger issue for all of us right now, and we’re trying

to work our way through it together,” Seattle Mariners owner John Stanton said at the team’s camp in Peoria, Arizona.

“I believe that this is going to be something that will have a lot more twists and turns to it. I don’t have a high degree of confidence that we will start on April 9,” he said.

MLB had continued to play into Thursday, two weeks before the season had been set to start with a pair of simultaneous games:

Detroit at Cleveland and World Series champion Washington at the New York Mets.

Texas had been looking forward to the opening of its retractable-roof ballpark, Globe Life Field, first with an exhibition against St. Louis on March 23 and then a formal opener against the Mike Trout and the Los Angeles Angels on March 31.

But baseball changed course after Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said at a

morning news conference he had strongly recommended to local authorities and organizers that they limit all mass gatherings.

“MLB and the clubs have been preparing a variety of contingency plans regarding the 2020 regular season schedule,” the commissioner’s office said in a statement. “MLB will announce the effects on the schedule at an appropriate time and will remain flexible as events warrant, with the hope of resuming nor-

mal operations as soon as possible.”

Players with big league contracts likely will be allowed to leave spring training and go home if they want to, but no decision on that was made public.

“Pretty shocked,” Davis said. “Just how quickly things have escalated.”

“There are so many questions that I have, and I know a bunch of guys have approached me with questions I just don’t have answers to,” he added. “It doesn’t seem real.”

MLB had not had a mass postponement of openers since 1995, when the season was shortened from 162 games to 144 following a 7 1/2-month players’ strike that also wiped out the 1994 World Series. Opening day was pushed back from April 2 to April 26 and player salaries were reduced by 11.1% because the games were lost due to a strike.

After a 32-day spring training lockout in 1990 caused opening day to be delayed a week until April 9, the season was extended by three days to allow each team a full 162-game schedule.

Baseball’s first strike lasted from April 1-13 in 1972, and the season started April 15. Teams played 153-156 games.

This year marked the earliest opening day other than for international games. As it stood, Game 7 of the World Series would’ve been Oct. 28.

On ice: NHL suspends season amid coronavirus pandemic

By STEPHEN WHYNO
AND JOHN WAWROW
AP Hockey Writers

NEW YORK — The NHL has placed its season on ice — for now.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said Thursday the league will “pause” its season, effective immediately, because of the coronavirus pandemic. The move came one day after the NBA suspended its season after a player tested positive for COVID-19.

Bettman said the hope is to resume play later and still award the Stanley Cup.

“Following last night’s news that an NBA player has tested positive for coronavirus — and given that our leagues share so many facilities and locker rooms

and it now seems likely that some member of the NHL community would test positive at some point — it is no longer appropriate to try to continue to play games at this time,” Bettman said.

The NHL Players’ Association backed the decision, calling it “an appropriate course of action at this time” and adding: “The players are looking forward to the opportunity to resume play in front of hockey fans everywhere.”

The NHL is halting play with 189 games left in the season and uncertainty about how many more — if any — could be played before the playoffs, which typically begin in early April. A handful of European hockey leagues have already called off the

remainder of their seasons.

“We will continue to monitor all the appropriate medical advice, and we will encourage our players and other members of the NHL community to take all reasonable precautions — including by self-quarantine, where appropriate,” Bettman said. “Our goal is to resume play as soon as it is appropriate and prudent, so that we will be able to complete the season and award the Stanley Cup.”

The NHL preceded its decision by having all 31 teams cancel practices and pre-game skates.

It was difficult to determine what steps teams or players can take in regards to practicing or even working out during the hiatus. For now, Martin Frk scor-

ing with 4:41 remaining in the Los Angeles Kings’ 3-2 win over Ottawa stands as the final goal of the 2019-20 season.

“Public health and safety are a priority at a time like this,” Edmonton captain Connor McDavid said. “As players, we support the NHL an NHLPA’s decision to suspend the season for the safety of the teams and their fans. We look forward to the day we can get back playing the game we love in front of full arenas.”

Following St. Louis’ 4-2 win at Anaheim, Blues coach Craig Berube was already wondering how to prepare for the unscheduled and indefinite time off.

“You can practice as much as you want but without playing games it is dif-

ficult,” said Berube, who played 17 seasons in the NHL. “It’s a bigger issue than a hockey game. We have to deal with what we have to. We have to keep ourselves in shape and as sharp as we can if we start up again.”

Former Sabres captain Brian Gionta was supposed to be among the players honored on Friday night as part of Buffalo’s 50th anniversary celebrations.

“I think that’s the least of the worries,” Gionta said. “I think everybody is worried about their families, their loved ones, and the bigger picture in general, and all that other stuff is secondary noise. It’s something we haven’t seen in our lifetime and it’s much bigger than sports.”

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people recover from the new virus.

Sports in Asia, Europe and now North America have been hit particularly hard by concerns about the virus and the cancellations came with dizzying speed this week. The NBA suspended its season after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19. His teammate, Donovan Mitchell, also tested positive. Major League Baseball pushed back opening day at least two weeks.

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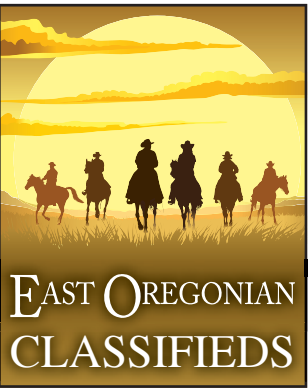
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		7						
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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