

David Stern sends a message to teams: basketball is a business not a sport

On Thursday, November 29, 2012 the San Antonio Spurs played the Miami Heat in Miami, Florida a game Miami won by the score of 105-100. While all the big name players were on the court for the Heat, San Antonio's coach Greg Popovich chose to send three of his starters: Tim Duncan, Tony Parker, and Manu Ginobili, home before the game started. Friday NBA commissioner David Stern announced he would impose sanctions on the team for doing this sending a message that money and not what's best for the players or team is what rules the league.

The World Championship Heat 11-3 and the Spurs 13-4 are two of the most popular teams in the league. Teams charge more for tickets to these games than for games against weaker teams. The league feels that what makes these games exciting is not only the teams but the players on those teams so when three of those players aren't even on the bench the league feels it takes away from the game. If this causes the teams to lose popularity then the league will not be able to charge as much for these games or sell as many jerseys, and lose money. For this reason David Stern chose to make an example of the Spurs by threatening them with sanctions for sending their three starters home. Unfortunately the message Stern is sending the teams by doing this is that they need to think about the business side of basketball before they consider what is best for their players when choosing who should play in what game.

Popovich said he made the decision to send Duncan, Parker, and Ginobili, all thirty years of age or older, home when he first saw the season schedule in July. This is the decision of a smart coach who considers the season as a whole rather than looking at individual games. The Spurs were at the end of a six game road trip and had already won all of the previous five games. Had the three players played Thursday night they would have Friday to travel home and prepare to play their division leaders, the Memphis Grizzlies Saturday night. That is a lot of stress on a thirty year old body. If you want further proof of that just ask the New York Knicks who have the oldest roster in NBA history. On nights when the Knicks have back to back games they do well on the first night only to struggle on the following night. Popovich knows that all three players have struggled with injuries in recent years that have kept them out for multiple games. For this reason when looking at the schedule Popovich likely decided that he would rather give his three aging stars an extra day's rest instead of forcing them to play multiple games and risk injury.

As Miami star LeBron James pointed out there is no rule forbidding coaches from holding players out from games. In fact teams frequently hold star players out from games to rest them, usually around the playoffs, but it can be done at other times as well. If the Spurs have not broken any rules how can Stern justify imposing sanctions on them? It seems that the reason Stern is going to take action against the Spurs is Popovich diminished the star power of the game by holding out his three stars. Stern should look at this another way if Popovich had played the three men

and one of them had gotten injured and missed multiple game then the star power of the team would take a greater hit. The fans who attended the game did not feel cheated, the game was a competitive affair with Ray Allen hitting a three pointer with 22.3 seconds left to give the Heat the winning points. On the whole I think David Stern is a good commissioner but I think he is sending a dangerous message to teams here. He is telling them that they must think of the business of basketball before they think of the good of their players. If teams start thinking like this in the long run you will have more players injured and games will not be as much fun to watch.