

Labour unions and players associations

■ What are labour unions in sports?

Sports labour unions were created in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when professional athletes began organising to protect their rights. In the United States, important unions appeared later. The Major League Baseball Players Association was founded in 1953 and became very powerful in the 1960s. **Labour unions** in sports are organisations that represent professional athletes and protect their rights and working conditions. These unions are created because athletes, like other workers, need protection and fair treatment. Sports careers are often short and physically demanding, so athletes must ensure they receive fair salaries, medical care, and safety protections. Labour unions help players negotiate contracts with teams and leagues through collective bargaining. This allows athletes to have a voice in important decisions about their careers, working hours, and conditions.



■ Role and functions of players associations

Players associations negotiate agreements between players and leagues. These agreements include salaries, bonuses, healthcare, insurance, and retirement plans. These associations also help athletes when they have legal problems,

contract disputes, or injuries. In addition, they work to improve player safety by promoting rules that reduce injuries. For example, the National Basketball Players Association represents NBA players and negotiates agreements with the league. Another example is FIFPRO, which represents professional football players worldwide and defends their rights. They also support athletes' education and help them prepare for life after their sports careers end.



■ Importance and challenges in professional sports

Labour unions in sports are important because they give athletes collective power. Without unions, individual players would have less influence when negotiating with powerful clubs and leagues. Unions help create fairness, protect athletes' health, and ensure equal treatment. However, there can be conflicts between unions and leagues, especially during contract negotiations. These conflicts sometimes lead to **strikes** or **lockouts**, which can stop competitions temporarily. Despite these challenges, labour unions in sports play a vital role in protecting athletes and improving professional sports conditions.

lockout: *serrata*
strike: *sciopero*

1 Answer the questions.

1. When were sports labour unions created?
2. Why did professional athletes create labour unions?
3. When was the Major League Baseball Players Association founded?
4. What do labour unions in sports do?
5. Why do athletes need labour unions?
6. What do players associations negotiate?
7. Can you give two examples of players associations?
8. What problems can happen between unions and leagues?

2  Read the text and fill in the gaps with the missing sentences.

- a. The union also works to improve player safety
- b. the NHLPA offers programmes
- c. representing professional ice hockey players in the National Hockey League (NHL).
- d. Overall, the NHLPA plays a vital role in professional ice hockey.
- e. players would have much less control over their rights and future.
- f. Before the NHLPA existed,



The National Hockey League Players' Association

The National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA) is the official labour union

1. It was founded in 1967 to protect players' rights and improve their working conditions. **2.** players had very little influence over salaries, contracts, and benefits, and team owners had most of the control. The creation of the NHLPA gave players a collective voice and more bargaining power.


The NHLPA negotiates agreements between players and league management through collective bargaining, covering salaries, bonuses, healthcare, insurance, and pension

plans. **3.** by promoting medical care and rules that reduce injuries. If players face contract disputes or legal problems, the NHLPA provides support and guidance.

Beyond negotiations, **4.** to help players prepare for life after their hockey careers. This includes education, career development, and financial advice. By doing this, the association ensures players can transition successfully once their professional careers end.

5. It protects players, promotes fairness, improves working conditions, and ensures athletes have a strong voice in decisions affecting their careers. Without the NHLPA, **6.**

Adapted from: <https://www.nhlpa.com/>

3  **GROUP WORK** Discuss with the class other professions where labour unions and players associations are important.