

Injuries dominate NBA playoffs, sidelining even stars

BY TIM REYNOLDS
AP BASKETBALL WRITER

These are the NBA playoffs of survival, where not even the stars are safe.

The latest blow to this post-season: Jayson Tatum was wheeled off Monday night, his season with the defending champion Boston Celtics over because of a right Achilles tendon tear that surely will mean he misses at least some of next season as well.

Golden State's Stephen Curry may run out of time before his injured hamstring allows him to play again. Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell is dealing with an ankle issue. If the Los Angeles Lakers' season had gone any deeper, LeBron James would have been sidelined with a knee sprain. And Milwaukee's Damian Lillard tore his Achilles, putting next season in some doubt and raising questions about Giannis Antetokounmpo's future as well.

The star power is gone in some cases, aching in others, and there's no question that injuries are becoming the story of this postseason. For Lillard — and now Tatum, too — the issues will linger into next season or rob of them of the chance to play in 2025-26 entirely.

“Obviously we want to go out there and compete, but when a



Mark J. Terrill/Associated Press

Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James lays on the floor after injuring his knee during the second half in Game 5 of an NBA basketball first-round playoff series against the Minnesota Timberwolves, April 30, in Los Angeles.

player of his caliber goes down and he's rolling in pain like that, you know something's wrong,” New York guard Jalen Brunson said after seeing Tatum's injury on Monday night. “So, that's why I just gave my thoughts and prayers — because you never want to see something like that, ever.”

Injuries are a constant, and the regular season saw some big-name players forced to shut down much earlier than they wanted. Philadelphia's Joel Embiid wasn't right for basically the entire season because of knee issues, Dallas' Kyrie Irving tore his ACL in March, San Antonio's Victor Wemban-

yama developed a blood clot that forced his season to end in February, New Orleans' Dejounte Murray tore his Achilles in January, Orlando's Moritz Wagner tore his ACL in December and two stars with long injury histories — the Los Angeles Clippers' Kawhi Leonard and New Orleans' Zion Williamson

— both were inactive for more than half the season.

Overcoming injuries is just part of NBA life, Bucks coach Doc Rivers said.

“The human spirit is amazing,” Rivers said. “It really is.”

And in the playoffs, the hits keep coming. Stars are hurting, most of Cleveland's starting lineup has been banged-up in these playoffs, Denver's Michael Porter Jr. is playing through a shoulder issue that typically needs weeks to deal with, and Memphis' Ja Morant had a hip problem that kept him from being on the floor at the end of the Grizzlies' season. Even teams that are winning aren't doing so at anywhere near 100% — case in point, Brunson has been dealing with an ankle issue and it somehow isn't slowing him down.

“Every year, playoffs are about adapting, whether it's a game plan, or an injury, or a lineup,” Golden State coach Steve Kerr said shortly after Curry got hurt in the Warriors' second-round series against Minnesota. “So, we just have to adapt.”

Down 3-1 in the series and facing a win-or-else game Wednesday, the Warriors are running out of time to adapt. There will be an update on Curry's status Wednesday, Kerr said. It wouldn't seem likely that Curry plays in Game 5.

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