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SPORTS SPECTRUM: THE NBA'S INJURY CRISIS

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Less than a month into the NBA season, about 90 players were on the injured list heading into Monday night's action. On Wednesday, Oct. 28, over 15% of the league couldn't play due to injuries.

Injuries have hit the NBA so hard that the Indiana Pacers had to play with just six players on Monday night. This is the earliest in almost 80 years that a team has used so few players. According to ESPN Research, the last time this happened was in 1948, when the Lakers used only five players in their third game. , the last time this happened was in 1948, when the Lakers used only five players in their third game.

It's time to talk about the issue: injuries in the NBA. It's been budding uncomfortably under the chairs of the NBA's offices for a long time.

To recap (as discussed in a previous article), the problem started harmlessly enough during the 2018-19 season. The Raptors' sports science staff introduced the term "load management" to the injury report to manage Kawhi Leonard's injury on the second night of back-to-back games.

It worked well, since Leonard played only 60 regular-season games and led the Raptors to an NBA title. Other teams copied this approach, and when it spread across the league, veteran media pundits quickly criticized it.

Instead of explaining the details, they immediately started criticizing players' character. This criticism follows two main ideas.

The first idea is false equivalence. In a clip from The Dan Patrick Show, Charles Barkley calls it the sport's most embarrassing issue, saying players "aren't working in steel mills." Fans often repeat this same comparison in the comments.

It's important to point out that working a physically demanding service job for 40 hours a week isn't the same as repeatedly stopping and starting at high speed when you weigh about 240 pounds and are over six feet tall, four or five nights a week.

The media has shaped today's environment, where players feel pressured to play through injuries they should probably rest. This creates two types of pressure: Players are encouraged to play more games to help with contract talks, yet they also face heavy criticism about their performance, no matter how the public views their injuries.

As a result, the league office made it official in the 2023 Collective Bargaining Agreement by adding the Player Participation Policy and the strict 65-game rule.

The Board of Governors approved this rule, which clearly bans teams from resting several star players in the same game or keeping them out of nationally televised games. The first violation leads to a $100,000 fine, the second to $250,000 and each additional offense adds $1 million more.

Even so, the second idea comes into play: You're criticized no matter what you do. Stephen A. Smith criticized Tyrese Haliburton's effort in the 2025 NBA Finals while he played through a calf strain. At one point, Smith said he was "glad he was injured," though he later tried to explain that he was glad we understood why Haliburton played the way he did.

Skip Bayless took it even further, tweeting that the Pacers had "planted" the injury story to take the pressure off him. Minutes later, Haliburton tore his Achilles on live television for the entire NBA community to see.

Haliburton was the third player to tear his Achilles in the 2025 postseason, joining Jayson Tatum and Damian Lillard. Generally treated as an abnormality, a lot of injuries recently are to the lower legs — ankles, hamstrings and the like. Injuries and games missed are on the rise, while time missed is on the decline, as Brian Sutterer states on X.

Aside from the media's influence, the game itself has changed. If you look at "Pace" in the box score, which estimates team possessions per 48 minutes, the league has shifted direction.

In the 1970s and '80s, teams averaged 100 to 108 possessions per game. This number dropped to 90 to 92 in the '90s and 2000s, but now it's back up to 98 to 100. Today's players move more than ever, mainly because offenses spread out as far as 30 feet from the basket.

Players cover 390 feet per minute through constant cutting, switching and closeouts. Earlier fast-paced eras relied mainly on straight-line sprints from baseline to baseline; centers ran down the middle and stayed near the rim.

Today's fast pace requires players to stop quickly and change direction often. With defenses switching and offenses looking for three-pointers, big men have to sprint to the perimeter to defend pick-and-rolls, change direction and then run back to the rim.

The human body can handle running straight ahead. What it can't handle, and what's causing more hamstring strains, calf tears and other non-contact injuries, is stopping suddenly at full speed in different directions on a bigger court for 82 games. Players are now covering more ground at higher speeds than ever, which changes the injury discussion.



Toronto Raptor Kawhi Leonard holds the ball on the court. Leonard only played 60 games in the 2018-2019 regular season and lead the Raptors to an NBA title.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

So, is there a solution? Simply put, the league can't agree on one.

The only logical answer is to shorten the season and eliminate back-to-back games. It's worth noting that teams no longer play three games in four nights, which is an improvement. Still, to reduce the strain, the season would need fewer games and more time between them.

The main reason the league won't do this is money. With ESPN/ABC, NBC/Peacock and Amazon Prime Video, too much is at stake in broadcast deals and ticket sales. To make up for lost revenue, venues would likely raise ticket prices, making it even harder for fans to afford seeing star players.

No amount of fines or 65-game rules can fix a game that is wearing down players' bodies.

Many of the attitudes around this issue come from something called injury indoctrination. Physical pain, trauma and playing through injuries have become normalized in highly competitive or commercial sports environments.

We've seen this in baseball, where pitchers injure their arms trying to throw harder; in football, with head injuries; more recently, with the Jalen Hurts situation and in hockey, where high-impact collisions happen in both major leagues and youth sports.

The NBA holds just a microcosm of this problem in its palm right now.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: NO. 2 UCONN TRAVELS TO ANN ARBOR FOR FIRST TIME, TAKES ON NO. 5 MICHIGAN

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The battle of the blue bloods is set to begin.

The No. 2 University of Connecticut women's basketball program will travel to Michigan Thursday to take on the No. 5 Michigan Wolverines. While it's the first time the Huskies have traveled to Ann Arbor, Mich., it's not the first time these programs have gone head-to-head to face one another.

The last time these two foes faced one another was last November in the Invesco QQQ Women's Hall of Fame Showcase. In what ended up being a down-to-the-wire matchup, the Huskies won the game, 72-69.

Ahead of that matchup, head coach Geno Auriemma said that at the time, Michigan was the toughest opponent they had faced so far.

"Based on what I've seen from Michigan, they will be, for sure, the best team we play this year; by a long shot, at this time in the season," Auriemma said.

Now, as the Huskies gear up to face them again, it's another highly anticipated matchup as a part of the Huskies' slate. While the last time these two squads faced off brought a 31-point for Azzi Fudd and a 20-rebound night for Sarah Strong, the Huskies had to weather a few hurdles to get there.



UConn women's basketball faces off against Cornell University on Nov. 2 at PeoplesBank Arena. UConn dominated the first half with a score of 46-13.

PHOTO BY NORA MARIANO, ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

One of those hurdles on the Wolverines roster was Syla Swords, who is currently in her junior campaign. As Swords worked to cut her team's deficit against the Huskies, she kept nailing shots beyond the arc, racking up a total of 29 points while playing the entire 40-minute game on the hardwood.

Another tall task for the Huskies came with defending Swords' teammate Olivia Olson who collected a double-double consisting of 18 points and 10 rebounds.

"They went to their strengths, you know, and we went to ours, and we just had enough at the end to put it away," Auriemma said postgame last November after the win against the Wolverines.

Now, the Huskies will lean on their strengths again in the matchup. This time, these strengths will look a little different.

Strong is coming off a dominant sophomore year, capped off by bringing the National Player of the Year trophy. In Connecticut's season opener versus Cornell, the North Carolina native racked up a career high of eight steals.

Against Cornell and alongside Strong, Jovana Popovic was the anchor for the Huskies' defense. With this season being her freshman year, Popovic is a player the Wolverines haven't faced off against.

"She plays at a pace that all good players play," Auriemma said after UConn's first preseason game against Syracuse when asked about Popovic. "She doesn't get sped up. She doesn't lose her composure out there. She knows what she's good at."

Along with Strong and Popovic, the Huskies will also have Blanca Quiñonez at their disposal. Quiñonez returned to the court in the season opener against Cornell, after missing UConn's three-game exhibition series due to rehabbing a shoulder injury.

With Strong, Popovic and Quiñonez on the court, it'll prove to be a tall task for the Wolverines to defend.

"She just gives us a different look out there. She gives us a different dimension," Auriemma said on Monday when asked about Quiñonez. "When she and Sarah are on the floor together, there's a lot of chemistry between the two of them."

As the Huskies officially start their competitive non-conference slate against Michigan, defeating the Wolverines will be a cheat code for Connecticut to utilize, especially with tougher opponents like South Carolina on the horizon.

"They have a style of play that I think is fun to watch," Auriemma said when asked about the Michigan matchup. "They're well coached and I'm sure they're incredibly good at home because that's what all good teams are."

Tip-off between these two programs is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. from the Crisler Center in Ann Arbor, Mich. Husky fans can tune in to the matchup on FS1.