Players shut down NBA playoffs in protest over Jacob Blake shooting

Alan Gilman
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On Wednesday, the Milwaukee Bucks of the National Basketball Association (NBA) refused to leave their locker room for their first-round playoff game with the Orlando Magic. Within an hour of the Bucks' boycott, the NBA announced all the day's games had been officially postponed and would be rescheduled, as the Oklahoma City Thunder, Houston Rockets, Los Angeles Lakers and Portland Trail Blazers were planning to sit out their games as well.

Players have reportedly called for a meeting in Orlando Wednesday night as they attempt to figure out their next steps, according to *The Athletic*. All playoff games by all NBA teams are being held in Orlando, in the same facility and without live audiences, in order to minimize the risk of coronavirus to players and team staff.

This unprecedented boycott comes as NBA players have continued to be at the forefront in speaking out about social and racial injustices following the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among others.

Over 70 percent of the NBA's players are black and Milwaukee is 50 miles north of Kenosha. In announcing minutes before the start of Wednesday's game that his team would not be playing, Bucks guard George Hill told *The Undefeated*. "We're tired of the killings and the injustice."

Hill, as one of the leaders of the boycott, had on Monday intimated his frustration with the NBA resuming basketball in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder. "We can't do anything from Orlando," he said. "First of all, we shouldn't have even come to this damn place, to be honest. I think coming here just took all the focal points off what the issues are."

Hill's feelings echoed numerous players in the NBA who had opposed resuming the season. Many did so reluctantly, fearing it would dissipate many of their voices that were prominent during the protest movement inspired by the police murder of George Floyd, particularly when they would all be confined to the artificial environment in Orlando.

When the NBA season resumed in late July virtually all players knelt during the national anthem, while "Black Lives Matter" was emblazoned on the courts in the Disney World bubble. Most players have sported social-justice messages on their jerseys, replacing their names with words such as Justice, Peace, Equality, Freedom, and Enough. Many international players display these words in their native languages.

LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers, the NBA's most prominent star and increasingly outspoken on social issues, said, "I know people get tired of hearing me say it but we are scared as Black people in America. Black men, black women, black kids, we are terrified. Because you don't know, you have no idea. You have no idea how that cop that day left the house. You don't know if he woke up on the good side of the bed, you don't know if he woke up on the wrong side of the bed."

Doc Rivers, the African-American coach of the Los Angeles Clippers, attended Marquette University in Milwaukee, only an hour's drive from Kenosha, and his father was a policeman. He became emotional during his news conference after the Clippers game on Tuesday evening.

Rivers criticized many of the speakers at the Republican National Convention the night before for talking about fear while black Americans live in actual fear of policing in this country. "All you hear is Donald Trump and all of them talking about fear," he said. "We're the ones getting killed. We're the ones getting shot."

Kenny Smith, a longtime TNT analyst and 10-year NBA player, walked off the "NBA on TNT" set in support of the players on Wednesday as the show began saying, "I think the biggest thing now—as a black man and a former player—I think it's best for me to not be here tonight."

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Many other professional athletes throughout the sports world have also expressed their outrage over the Blake shooting.

In Major League Baseball (MLB) the Milwaukee Brewers reliever Devin Williams took the mound Monday, August 24 at Miller Park in the seventh inning of a game against the Cincinnati Reds. With his foot, Williams wrote “BLM” in the clay. Then he proceeded to strike out the side.

On Wednesday, after the Milwaukee Bucks triggered the shutdown of pro basketball games, the Brewers followed suit, refusing to take the field Wednesday night against the Reds in Miller Park. As the news spread, two more night games were cancelled on the west coast: the Seattle Mariners against the San Diego Padres in San Diego, and the Los Angeles Dodgers against the San Francisco Giants in San Francisco.

In the National Football League (NFL), in which all teams are in training camps in preparation for the start of the season in September, dozens of players took to social media to express their outrage over the shooting of Blake.

The Detroit Lions on Tuesday cancelled their practice and after a long meeting assembled near the front of the team’s headquarters to speak to the media.

Quarterback Matthew Stafford said there has never been a day he was more proud to be a Lion and a quarterback in the NFL than Tuesday. “We had our team meeting this morning and no football was talked about. Coach just opened the floor. The conversations lasted four hours and it was incredible to be a part of it.”

“We can’t be silent,” defensive lineman Trey Flowers said. “We can’t stay silent. It can’t be us going through our regular day. So today we stand unified. We are all brothers, the human race. We are all one, and once we realize that and overcome just the difference of skin color, the difference of culture, then we’ll start to love one another, treat others as they are us.”

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