

Boycott: NBA playoff games called off amid player protest over police shooting

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Referees huddle on an empty court at game time of the scheduled Game 5 of an NBA basketball first-round playoff series between the Milwaukee Bucks and Orlando Magic on August 26, 2020, in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. Photo: Kevin C. Cox/Pool Photo via AP

All six National Basketball Association (NBA) playoff games scheduled for August 26 and August 27 have been postponed. Players around the league chose to boycott the games. This was their strongest statement yet against racial injustice. To boycott something is to stop doing it or supporting it in protest of something. The players chose to not play to protest the unfair treatment of Black people in the U.S.

On August 26 games were called off between the Milwaukee Bucks from Wisconsin and the Orlando Magic from Florida. The match between the Los Angeles Lakers from California and the Portland Trail Blazers from Oregon was also canceled. So was the game between the Houston Rockets from Texas and the Oklahoma City Thunder from Oklahoma. The NBA said all three games would be rescheduled. They did not say when, however.

The dramatic series of moves began on August 26. The Bucks didn't take the floor for their playoff game against the Magic.

Just a few days before the playoff games something had happened in Wisconsin. Jacob Blake, an unarmed Black man was shot by police officers on August 23. The shooting happened in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The teams were set to begin Game 5 of the series on August 26. The Bucks needed to win the game to advance to the next round.

"Change Is Coming"

Players had started talking about boycotting the games in the 2020 NBA Bubble after the shooting. It is also referred to as just "the bubble." More discussions were planned for August 26. However, the Bucks made their decision before then.

The bubble refers to the isolation zone at Walt Disney World in Florida. The bubble was created by the NBA to protect its players from the COVID-19 pandemic. It would allow them to finish the final eight games of the 2019-2020 regular season. It would also allow for the 2020 playoffs to take place. Team members in the bubble cannot leave until the season is over. This will limit the number of people who interact with each other. It will also help limit the spread of the coronavirus.

"Some things are bigger than basketball," Bucks Senior Vice President Alex Lasry tweeted. "The stand taken today by the players and (the organization) shows that we're fed up. Enough is enough. Change needs to happen. I'm incredibly proud of our guys and we stand 100 percent behind our players ready to assist and bring about real change."

Several NBA players, including LeBron James, tweeted out messages demanding change. The Boston Celtics's official Twitter account did the same.

"We weren't given advanced notice about the decision but we are happy to stand in solidarity with Milwaukee, Jacob and the entire NBA community," Michael Carter-Williams said. He plays for the Orlando basketball team. "Change is coming."

Some Players Didn't Want To Return To Games

Magic players and referees were on the basketball court for the game. However, Milwaukee never took the floor. Eventually, everyone else left. The arena staff soon took the balls, towels and tags that go on player chairs back inside.

Demanding societal change and ending racial injustice has been a major part of the NBA's restart at Walt Disney World. The NBA season was paused briefly because of COVID-19. It restarted in the bubble in July.

The phrase "Black Lives Matter" is painted on the arena courts. Players are wearing messages urging change on their jerseys. And coaches are wearing pins demanding racial justice as well.

Many players did not know if they should play. They worried about what returning to play could mean. It might take the attention off the recent death of Black people by police. This includes Breonna Taylor. It also includes George Floyd.

Taylor was a 26-year-old Black woman from Louisville, Kentucky. She was fatally shot when police officers burst into her apartment in March. They were looking for someone else. That person did

not actually live there. Then on May 25, Floyd was killed by a white Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer. Floyd's death was captured on a cell phone video.

Anniversary Of Kaepernick's Protest

Bucks guard George Hill said after Blake's shooting that he felt players shouldn't have come to Disney.

"We're the ones getting killed," Los Angeles Clippers coach Doc Rivers, who is Black, said in an emotional postgame speech the night of August 25. "We're the ones getting shot. We're the ones that we're denied to live in certain communities. We've been hung. We've been shot. And all you do is keep hearing about fear. It's amazing why we keep loving this country and this country does not love us back. And it's just, it's really so sad."

The Boston Celtics from Massachusetts and Toronto Raptors from Canada met August 25. They discussed boycotting Game 1 of their Eastern Conference semifinal series, which had been scheduled for August 27.

The postponed NBA games came on the fourth anniversary of Colin Kaepernick's very first protest of "The Star-Spangled Banner" before a National Football League preseason game. Kaepernick sat through the anthem for his first protest in the 2016-2017 season, which he said was to protest racial inequality and police mistreatment of minorities. He then famously kneeled during the anthem going forward. After the season Kaepernick became a free agent, or available to join any team. However, he has remained unsigned to a team since then. Many people say he has not been signed because of his political activism.

A String of Boycotts And Postponements

The walkout of NBA players set off a string of boycotts and game postponements in four other major sports leagues.

The Women's National Basketball Association postponed three games the night of August 26. Four teams that were scheduled to play took a knee in the center of the court before leaving.

Three Major League Baseball games were postponed on August 26. On August 27, the league postponed more games.

Five of six Major League Soccer games set to take place on August 26 were also postponed.

The National Hockey League postponed two days of playoff games on August 27. Some Black players disapproved of the league and said it was slow to recognize the police shooting of Jacob Blake.

Editor's note: This story was updated on August 27 at 5 p.m. Pacific Time.

Quiz

- 1 What is the relationship between Jacob Blake and Breonna Taylor?
- (A) Both were victims of police violence, sparking protests of racial injustice.
 - (B) One supports the NBA players' decision to boycott, and the other does not.
 - (C) Both were involved in the decision to boycott NBA playoff games.
 - (D) One is an NBA player participating in the boycott and the other is a fan who supports it.
- 2 WHY did Doc Rivers feel upset after his team's game on August 25?
- (A) He was disappointed they lost, knocking them out of the playoffs for the year.
 - (B) He was unaware the other team planned to boycott the game until it was supposed to begin.
 - (C) He was saddened by both current and historic violence against Black Americans.
 - (D) He was hopeful the NBA would release a statement in support of the boycott, but it did not.
- 3 Read the section "Change Is Coming."
- Which sentence shows Alex Lasry's point of view about his team's decision not to play?
- (A) Players had started talking about boycotting the games in the 2020 NBA Bubble after the shooting.
 - (B) The bubble was created by the NBA to protect its players from the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - (C) "I'm incredibly proud of our guys and we stand 100 percent behind our players ready to assist and bring about real change."
 - (D) "We weren't given advanced notice about the decision but we are happy to stand in solidarity with Milwaukee, Jacob and the entire NBA community."
- 4 What does the author want the reader to understand about the NBA?
- (A) It has successfully continued its season, despite the risks of COVID-19.
 - (B) Its players and teams are debating whether to play out the rest of the 2020 season.
 - (C) It has served as an example for other sports leagues on how to engage in protest.
 - (D) Its players and teams are organizing and speaking out for racial justice and equality.