

# THE SPORTIER

## NBA Fans Out of Control

The NBA Playoffs have gotten off to a hot start. From the New York Knicks winning their first playoff game since 2013, to the Los Angeles Lakers being caught up in a tight First Round battle with the Phoenix Suns, there has been no shortage of excitement in the just over a week since the beginning of postseason play. Unfortunately, the playoffs have also brought with it some issues, it has to do with fans in attendance. All teams in the playoffs are allowing fans in their stadiums, even if the numbers are not equal. For example, the Portland Trail Blazers are allowing 10% capacity in their stadium, the lowest out of any playoff team, while the Atlanta Hawks have been allowing full capacity at their home games against the Knicks. Regardless of the capacity of fans allowed, NBA teams have been restrictive on the amount of fans, if allowing them at all, throughout the entire regular season. Now, with attendance finally being accepted across all teams, fans are getting to experience the NBA Playoffs for the first time in two years, as last years' playoffs was hosted at a secure site at Disney World in Orlando. Because of this "new" experience, fans have been getting out of control.

The first incidents were on May 26. During the Knicks 101-92 victory over the Hawks at Madison Square Garden, it was revealed that a Knicks fan had spit on Hawks point guard Trae Young. Young, who had led the Hawks to a victory over New York three night prior with a 32-point performance, had also taunted Knicks fans by shushing the crowd during the game. This likely got many Knicks fans riled up, and one fan took it way too far and spit on Young when he was trying to inbound the ball. The Knicks later released an apology to Young and the Hawks organization, while noting that they had suspended the fan indefinitely from Madison Square Garden. On the same night, in a series between the Philadelphia 76ers and the Washington Wizards, Wizards guard Russell Westbrook was limping to the locker room after injuring his ankle in the fourth quarter. While heading through the tunnel, a fan from the Philadelphia crowd dumped their popcorn on Westbrook, which led to the former MVP to get extremely heated, trying to fight off his security personnel to get to the fan who had showered him with popcorn. The 76ers also released an apology in the direction of Westbrook and the Wizards, while also announcing that the fan, a season ticket holder, had been banned from attending games at their arena indefinitely. As if these two incidents hadn't caused enough problems for the playoffs, there was more to come. In Game 2 of the First Round series between the Memphis Grizzlies and Utah Jazz, the family of Grizzlies point guard Ja Morant was subject to explicit remarks from three fans. Ja's father, Tee Morant, said that him and his wife, Jamie Morant, were subject to inappropriate remarks. While many were thrown at the two, the final remark that was in the direction of Jamie Morant from a Jazz fan was, "Shut the f\*\*\* up, b\*\*\*\*." Clearly unacceptable, the Jazz apologized to any people affected by these fans, and after removing the fans during the game, announced that the three identified fans had been banned from their arena indefinitely.

The problems don't stop there. A Boston Celtics fan was arrested on the charges of assault and battery after throwing a water bottle at Brooklyn Nets point guard (and former Celtic) Kyrie Irving's head just this past Sunday. The Celtics handed down the heaviest punishment out of all the incidents so far, with the fan receiving a lifetime ban from the Celtics' TD Garden, as well as the fan being required to present themselves before the Boston Municipal Court today. Finally, during yesterday's 76ers-Wizards game in Washington, DC, a fan was apprehended by arena police after running onto the court after touching the backboard. The fan will be banned from the arena, the Wizards announced, and DC police are pursuing charges.

The string of inappropriate behavior during the NBA playoffs has been extreme. Players such as LeBron James have tweeted their frustration, with LeBron using the hashtag "#ProtectOurPlayers" to send a message to the league and its fans. Trae Young and his father expressed the sentiment that while the boos and chants about can be tolerated, there is no place for over-the-top reactions from fans to take place that negatively affect the players and their families.

Even though the NBA released a statement the day following the first three incidents, which addressed a further enforced fan code of conduct, they noted that the return of fans in large numbers has brought "excitement and energy to start the playoffs." With this in mind, it is important that the fans give the players themselves the respect they deserve. While a return to normal is going under way, there has never and will never be an excuse for fans interfering with players, even if fans are riled up for a return to in-person sporting events.

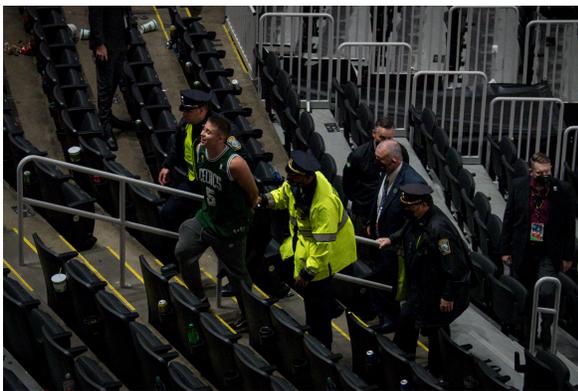
## Osaka Withdraws

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Number 2 ranked Women's Tennis player Naomi Osaka has withdrawn from the French Open following a controversy with the media on Sunday. Osaka had skipped her mandatory media obligations, which resulted in a \$15,000 fine, and she was threatened with removal from the tournament if she continued this. Instead, Osaka announced on social media that she would be withdrawing from the Open on her own terms, saying that, "I never wanted to be a distraction and I accept that my timing was not ideal and my message could have been clearer." Osaka revealed in this announcement that, since the 2018 US Open (which she won), she has suffered several bouts of depression and continues to cope with her social anxiety. She said that because she is not a "natural public speaker," she felt very nervous and stressful to need to take part in a press conference. She said that she will be taking time away from the game of tennis, but hopes to work to find ways to make interactions for players with fans and the media more comfortable.

Several athletes came to the support of Osaka. In the tennis world, 17-year-old women's tennis player Coco Gauff told Osaka to "stay strong." 18-time Grand Slam champion Martina Navratilova and current tennis legend Serena Williams both expressed their support for Osaka, with Williams saying, "I feel for Naomi. I feel like I wish I could give her a hug, because I know what it's like." Outside of tennis, two-time NBA MVP Stephen Curry tweeted out his support for Osaka by writing, "So damn impressive taking the high road when the powers that be don't protect their own."

With Osaka addressing her mental health struggles, it only makes you wonder how many other players, across all sports, experience similar problems, but they leave them unaddressed because they are not willing to speak up against the organizations that have the ultimate power. Penalties, such as the ones that Osaka had to incur, are also deterrents for players speaking out on their personal struggles. Hopefully, Osaka's message can serve as an example of players needing to take care of themselves and putting their health first, as that is the best way for them to put forth their best performance.



MAY 30 - CELTICS FAN ARRESTED AFTER THROWING WATER BOTTLE AT KYRIE IRVING



NAOMI OSAKA

Sources:

[SkySports](#), [NBA](#), [NBA](#), [CNN](#), [USA Today](#), [ESPN](#), [ESPN](#), [Twitter](#)