

Sports medicine researcher studies impact of lockouts, warns NBA of injuries

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This is a photo of a foot that has been injured. Credit: Courtesy: Ohio State University Medical Center

With the National Basketball Association (NBA) training camps now underway, serious injuries may come next. A national sports medicine expert, who published an article in a respected medical journal about the injury ramifications of lockouts, says players in the NBA should learn from information analyzed after the National Football League (NFL) lockout.

The study found that more career-threatening and potentially career-ending [Achilles tendon](#) injuries were suffered in the first two weeks of NFL training camp than occurred in an entire season. The data shows that Achilles [tendon injuries](#) to [NFL players](#) quadrupled compared to past years. Five researchers from institutions including The Ohio State

University Medical Center evaluated early NFL injury rates and saw a correlation between [sports injuries](#) and preparatory conditioning. The findings were detailed in a guest editorial in the *Journal of Orthopedic & Sports Physical Therapy*.

This year, following the rapid transition to training camp and preseason practices from the NFL lockout, ten Achilles tendon injuries occurred over the first 12 days of training camp. Two additional injuries occurred in the subsequent 17 days, which included the first two weeks of preseason competition.

"Extrapolate what we've seen in the NFL, and I could see in the NBA in the range of 2, 3, 4 times higher rates of injury," said Timothy Hewett, PhD, Director of Research at The Ohio State University Medical Center's sports medicine department. "This could be a historic event, where we start to think, 'Is there a potential for really putting players at risk by these legal wranglings?'"

The Achilles is the tendon that stretches over your heel. Injuries to that part of the body can not only be extremely painful, but terribly debilitating. If surgery is required, recovery can take 6 to 8 months, often more. In fact, "in the NFL, a third or more of athletes who rupture their Achilles tendon never play again," said Hewett. "And even those who do come back lose a full year of participation."

This past summer a 130 day labor dispute delayed the start of NFL training camps, and that time off may have proven costly. "Because these players were locked out, they did not have access to their professional [sports medicine](#) team," said Hewett. "We really think, based on the data, that it had a huge impact on their readiness to compete. The bottom line is, preparation for play is very important."

The NBA lockout lasted 149 days, making it even longer than the NFL

dispute. Dr. Hewett warns basketball players to learn from the injuries suffered in the NFL and take measures to protect themselves against this serious [injury](#). He hopes lessons learned from the NFL are also heeded by amateur athletes, youth coaches or anyone who decides to take up exercise after a period of reduced activity.

More information: Did the NFL Lockout Expose the Achilles Heel of Competitive Sports?, *Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy*, Volume 41, Number 10, October 2011.

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