

latimes.com/sports/basketball/nba/lakers/la-sp-1112-lakers-nash-20131112,0,3866441.story

latimes.com

VISIT WATKINSSPINE.COM

PRO BASKETBALL

Lakers' Steve Nash will miss at least two weeks because of back pain

The NBA's oldest point guard at 39 has racked up injuries since joining the Lakers in July 2012. There's a chance Nash will retire if his health doesn't improve, but it is rare for players to do so.

By Mike Bresnahan

8:07 PM PST, November 11, 2013

Steve Nash was hailed as a missing piece when the Lakers acquired him from Phoenix last year. advertisement

Now they're just trying to keep him in one piece.

He was supposed to be the answer to their failed attempt to snare Chris Paul, a solid second choice the NBA couldn't veto. But Nash was hit with more injury news Monday in a medical file that won't stop growing.

He will miss at least two weeks because of persistent back pain, the Lakers announced.

Nash was found to have nerve root irritation after being examined in Los Angeles by back specialist Robert Watkins. Nash will have an epidural shot Tuesday and be reevaluated in 10 days.

The nerves in his back affect the feeling in his left hamstring, leading to lack of mobility and pain that is "nearly constant," Nash said.

He spent several months trying to strengthen his back during the off-season but the soreness "slowly crept back in," he said. The injury affected his right hamstring last season.

Nash, who will be 40 in February, left a 113-90 loss to Minnesota in the second quarter Sunday, finishing with two points on one-for-three shooting. He is averaging 6.7 points and 4.8 assists, and shooting 26%.

The NBA's oldest point guard earns \$9.3 million this season and \$9.7 million next season, though the Lakers can waive him next summer via the "stretch provision" and spread out his remaining money over three years to decrease the salary-cap hit.

There's a chance Nash will retire if his health doesn't improve, but it is rare for players to do so and for teams to recoup any money. Nash's contract, like a large majority in the NBA, is guaranteed.

The Lakers got Nash from Phoenix for two first-round picks (2013, 2015) and two second-round picks (2013,

2014), and gave him a three-year, \$28-million contract.

Nash's back pain was the latest in a string of personal health woes. He was bothered by ankle and neck soreness during exhibition play and last week revealed he still felt pain from a broken leg last season that also caused nerve damage.

"A lot of wear and tear, and a lot of mileage," he said Sunday while leaving Staples Center. "There's a lot going on."

Nash already sat out two games this season as part of Coach Mike D'Antoni's plan to rest him one night in every back-to-back situation.

It was somewhat surprising to see Nash walk onto the Lakers' practice court Monday afternoon, but it was only to shoot an interview for Metta World Peace's website.

Then Nash was off to see Watkins, with whom the Lakers are very familiar. He was the doctor who repaired the herniated disk in Dwight Howard's back last year.

Steve Blake and Jodie Meeks will start for the Lakers on Tuesday against New Orleans, D'Antoni said.

Blake and backup point guard Jordan Farmar are averaging almost identical numbers — about 10 points and five assists each.

Already without Kobe Bryant because of a torn Achilles' tendon, Pau Gasol offered a "What next?" kind of laugh when asked what the team would do.

"Unfortunately, this league is too rough and too demanding to feel sorry about when a guy goes down. You fight through it and you try to survive and you make the best with what you've got," he said.

"The team that we have, we need everybody to be as healthy as possible and contributing as much as possible and being 100% but that's not going to happen, so that's going to put us in jeopardy sometimes."

They've been in jeopardy a lot in recent days.

Their 11-game game winning streak against New Orleans came crashing down Friday and their 22-game winning streak against Minnesota was terminated Sunday.

Nash showed few signs of slowing down in 2011-12, averaging 12.5 points and 10.7 assists for Phoenix before being dealt in July 2012 to the Lakers.

He sustained his broken leg in the second game last season and struggled to stay on the court since then.

He had four epidural shots in his back last April that were met with limited success. Nash kept playing through the discomfort but then missed the final two games of the Lakers' brief playoff run last season.

mike.bresnahan@latimes.com

Twitter: @Mike_Bresnahan