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## Despite recent struggles, Magic remain hopeful with playoffs fast approaching

By Associated Press, Published: April 24

ORLANDO, Fla. — It’s not every day that an NBA coach embraces a line popularized in a gritty crime film as a mantra for his team.

These are not typical times for the Orlando Magic or coach Stan Van Gundy. “We all we got” will have to do. Bad grammar and all.

That’s especially the case with All-Star Dwight Howard out for the season following back surgery and Van Gundy’s injury-riddled team needing a win in its last two games of the regular season to lock up the sixth spot in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

“I just thought it was apropos to what we’ve been going through,” said Van Gundy regarding the quote from the movie “New Jack City” that is echoing throughout the Magic locker room. “No. 1, we’re not looking around for excuses for what we’re going through. This is all we’ve got and we need to pull together to get the job done.”

In the mix to be one of the East’s top three teams a month ago, the Magic have dropped three straight games and five of their last seven. It has made them fall all the way to the sixth seed and a likely first-round matchup with Indiana.

Should they fail to beat either lowly 7-57 Charlotte in Wednesday’s home finale or Thursday at Memphis, they could slip to seventh and a pairing with Miami.

“We just gotta go out there and put together the best game we can,” said point guard Jameer Nelson, who is questionable for Wednesday with a calf bruise. “That and don’t worry about the standings or anything else. That’s more of a distraction than anything. We need to just go out and play our game, keep our intensity and our energy level up, go out and take care of business.”

Whatever happens, Howard won’t be on the sidelines to watch.

He is staying the Los Angeles area for at least the next three weeks to rehab after his back surgery and won’t be on the sidelines to watch during the postseason. Van Gundy said it’s been agreed by all involved



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that travel is not ideal for his back right now.

Dr. Robert Watkins, who performed Howard's surgery last week, released a statement late Tuesday saying though he's advised him not to travel that his post operation examination "showed significant improvement from his preoperative condition that necessitated from mandatory spine surgery." He will be reexamined this week.

The statement went on to say that while the Olympics are out for Howard this summer, Watkins is "very optimistic" he will be able to play next season.

Howard's absence has been noticeable for the Magic, particularly on the defensive end with Orlando going just 3-7 without him and allowing opponents to average above 50 percent shooting from the field in those games.

In the 54 games Howard played in this season, the Magic were 33-21 and held foes to 43 percent shooting.

"I'm sure he'd like to be around, but with him not playing it can't help us a whole lot, so he needs to do what's best for his rehab," Van Gundy said.

There's a little good news on the injury front for the Magic.

Forward Hedo Turkoglu, who has been sidelined since cheekbone surgery on April 7, participated in the non-contact part of practice Tuesday and shot afterward. He said he hopes to be back the first game of the playoffs.

"I'll try to do my best to put myself in that situation," he said. "And hopefully if I get a call, I'll just try to go out there and do my best to help the team. I don't know how long I will play. But when I do, I will try to do my best and try to provide something for the team."

Also, forwards Earl Clark (sore left knee) and Quentin Richardson (sore calf) sat out practice Tuesday, but are expected to play against the Bobcats.

Clark said who plays in the playoffs doesn't matter right now.

"I don't think we just worry about that, we're just trying to get a win," Clark said. "Just continue to get better, get some guys healthy and move forward. Whoever we play in the playoffs, it's going to be the playoffs and either you win or go home. To me (Indiana and Miami are) both tough teams and dangerous teams."

However it ends up, what is certain is that the Magic will have a much tougher time than many thought erasing the sting of a first-round playoff exit last season.

Still, forward Ryan Anderson rejected the notion that they are finished without Howard in the lineup.

"That's the safe thing for people to say," Anderson said. "We can go out and surprise a lot of people. I think we have a lot of talent and proven that we can beat great teams...If people want to call us the underdog or dead man walking or whatever it is, that's what they can think. That's the safe thing if you're a betting man."

"But I think we have a great team. We play extremely hard and I don't think we're going to give up without a fight."

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