

Curry's DNA fight with Bulls 'bigger than sports world'

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Curry's DNA fight with Bulls 'bigger than sports world'



Jim Litke

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CHICAGO -- Until last spring, [Eddy Curry](#) was just another cautionary tale about kids drafted before their time.



The [Chicago Bulls](#) plucked the 6-foot-11 manchild out of high school in 2001, and he played his first three seasons more flabby than feared. But Curry showed up for the final year of his rookie contract 40 pounds lighter, converted some of that enormous potential into production, and made the Bulls think they might yet see a return on their considerable investment.

Then, before a March 30 game at Charlotte, Curry's heart skipped a few beats.

And then, a few more.

Nearly six months later, after a diagnosis of benign arrhythmia sent the 22-year-old scurrying to cardiologists from coast to coast

and cost him the rest of the season, Curry finds himself in a fight with Bulls management his lawyer calls "far bigger than just the sports world."

At issue is the one-year, \$5 million deal Chicago offered Curry, with this proviso: before he sets foot on the court, Curry must submit to DNA testing.

"Think about what's at stake here," said Alan Milstein, Curry's attorney. "As far as DNA testing, we're just at the beginning of that universe. Pretty soon, though, we'll know whether someone is predisposed to cancer, alcoholism, obesity, baldness and who knows what else.

"Hand that information to an employer," he added, "and imagine the implications. If the NBA were to get away with it, what about everyone else in this country looking for a job."

Chicago general manager John Paxson insists the Bulls can test Curry as part of a routine physical when training camp opens next week. Milstein calls that notion "flat-out wrong," and one already rejected by the players' union during the last collective bargaining agreement.

"Besides, there are privacy laws on the books, both state and federal, so there's no way they'd win," he added. "It makes you wonder what they're really worried about."

Milstein isn't the only one asking. [Miami Heat](#) forward [Antoine Walker](#), like Curry a Chicago native, played pickup games alongside the youngster the last three weeks, and the dispute has him shaking his head.

"He looked fine, but a lot of teams seem concerned with risks nowadays. Maybe because the investments in players have become so big," Walker said. "Maybe the Bulls want Eddy long-term, and maybe this is some kind of bargaining chip. Either way, DNA testing is taking things a little too far."

Paxson says the team's only motive is to learn whether Curry's genetic makeup leaves him susceptible to cardiomyopathy, a heart condition that combined with arrhythmia, could prove fatal. He said the DNA test was suggested by Barry Maron, a world-renowned specialist in hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, and complained the team's stance is unfairly being portrayed as though "we have some other motive.

"The bottom line," Paxson added, "is if Eddy had not had any

incident and a doctor hadn't suggested it, we wouldn't be asking for it."

Curry has already been cleared to play by several prominent cardiologists, but he can't get disability insurance for his contract should he be sidelined again -- or worse -- with heart problems.

"There's one guy who isn't sure," Curry told the Chicago Tribune on Tuesday, making his first comments in a while. "I can live with that because of what the other doctors say."

If this was a private medical dispute, chances are the hype would be less and the stakes lower. But because of the liability issues, Curry's high profile, and the value a healthy, motivated big man can command in the NBA marketplace, it's become an expensive, mean-spirited mess.

Besides arguing over medial opinions and the science underpinning DNA testing, both camps have recently invoked the deaths of former Celtics star Reggie Lewis and Loyola Marymount's Hank Gathers. Both suffered from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy when they collapsed and died; what the Bulls and Curry's advisers disagree over is whether he is treading the same path.

"My best guess?" Milstein said. "Eddy shows up at camp, refuses the test, we go to arbitration and the arbitrator tells the Bulls they simply can't compel him. We'll find out soon enough."

That's what scares Jerome Stanley, Lewis' agent. He recalled the ride through Boston with Lewis' family in a limousine on the way to the funeral as one of the toughest things he ever had to do. Stanley said Tuesday he wishes now that DNA testing had been an option.

"I've seen this movie before," he said. "Eddy Curry and his family and his agent do not believe he can drop dead and die. You know what? He can drop dead and die. It goes just like that."

"If I'm the team, let the insurance be your guide," Stanley said. "The insurance won't insure it, that should tell you something. They've got the biggest group of risk managers."

"Now maybe they're wrong," he added. "But if you lose the bet, you don't just lose the player. The player dies."