

Sports Flu Dead at the Age of 13

By Eric Butterman

McKinney—I just watched the end of Mavericks-Heat Game Four and realized tragedy had struck. The sports flu has passed away, June 7th, just four days shy of only its 14th birthday, laid to rest at approximately 9:39 Central Time in Dallas, Texas. The sports flu, for those who don't know, was born in front of 19,911 witnesses in Salt Lake City before Game Five of the 1997 NBA Finals. Michael Jordan woke up with what was unmistakably the flu, including what we were to understand was nausea. I was 19 at the time and I was mesmerized. He has the flu? You mean, *the flu*? How can he even play? I've since learned that people do everything with the flu, especially mothers, holding infants in those crafty baby shoulder harnesses, getting the whole gang into the family roadster and pulling off more errands than thought possible. We've all seen it, seen it too often and that's why the famed sports flu died this evening, inhabiting a nice enough German named Dirk Nowitzki. His team won, said the headlines, and he had a temperature from the flu. For the first time, I looked at that information and, without hesitation, murmured, "What else ya got?" Admit it, we've found the cure for the sports flu. It's unlikely remedy? Well, I'd describe it as jumping the shark but that phrase has jumped the shark. Except that's been mentioned so many times that to say jumping the shark has jumped the shark has jumped the shark.

It's sad, in a way, that athletes will have to replace the sports flu, one of the top marketing campaigns for any superstar worth their phlegm. Will they need to come down with a terminal illness, or at least jump in front of a car to gain a serious yet non life-threatening debilitation? I will admit my ears would still perk up if I heard LeBron James got grill kissed by an SUV on his way to a Game 7 must-win. Maybe even David Stern would be driving. Certainly he has to acknowledge that the sports flu has been booping on life support for some time and even the possibility that some have—forgive me—been faking. I know, how could you even do it? 11-year-olds with a math test tomorrow just might hold the unwitting key.

But I know deep down that even an automotive setback would eventually become passé, as we barely glance up from our all-important cell phones, tersely asking, "But was it a 4Runner or just some little RAV?" I have to admit I'm going to miss the sports flu, the hold it had on all of us, gazing at our thermometers in disbelief and counting up from 98 to whatever number we were told our hero was suffering from. 99...100...101...it's just not possible. Except I might have 101 100 days out of the year. I don't even check a thermometer anymore, sometimes even forget I have one, trudging through life because I just don't have time to get sick. In fact, it makes me wonder how temperatures even fit into this machismo world of sport to begin with. I refuse to recognize what the mercury holds for me because I'm a man and so I must push on (like the mothers I mentioned), yet you have this image of athletes studying their thermometers every day before game time in hopes they'll have a fever they can tell us about and then shrug off, saying it's no big deal. You can almost see agents holding one up to a light bulb to assess on their behalf,

maybe even so close that the 60 watt might accidentally bump the temp just a little bit more—not that I ever did that when I was 11 to get out of a math test.

I will miss you sports flu, maybe because I'm not innocent enough to care about you, that I really have grown up enough to see you for the ridiculous that you've always been. But I must have one more stab at thee before I pull the plug and let you disappear from my life forever...Nope, 98.6. I have unfortunately written this entire piece without any flu at all.

If I had, I bet Nowitzki would have been blown away.