

Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry out at least the next two games; team then will determine next course of action

By Marcus Thompson II

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Warriors point guard Stephen Curry won't play Friday against the Los Angeles Lakers. Nor will he play Saturday against the Utah Jazz.

No one knows when he will play again on that sprained right ankle. Three sprains in just over two weeks have sounded an alarm in Warriors world. Concern, frustration and resolve are at an all-time high.

"We -- the training staff and doctors -- all agreed that as long as I didn't have any pain while I was playing, it was good enough to go," Curry said after Thursday's practice. "So maybe, I don't know, we're going to have to have that discussion again."

That's now seven sprains, plus surgery and rehab, on the same ankle in the past 15 months. Curry's right ankle has gone from nagging injury to gripping concern.

Warriors general manager Larry Riley said Curry will be evaluated in Oakland on Saturday. That evaluation will determine what happens next. New treatment? Elongated rest? More surgery?

Another trip to visit his surgeon is probably in the offing. One thing's for sure, the sprain-and-play pattern has to stop.

"It's the same ligament, and it's occurred three times," Riley said. "So, obviously, we've got to do something with this. We can't just continue the way things are going and expect it to get better."

It's imperative for the Warriors and Curry to solve this problem. Curry, after all, was unofficially deemed the franchise player when Golden State refused to ship him to New Orleans for Chris Paul.

And if co-owner Joe Lacob is to come through on his bid to land a star player, Curry figures to play a huge role. Team sources confirmed reports the Warriors have made a play for Orlando's Dwight Howard, even if he doesn't sign a long-term extension. But if that is to happen, Curry would either be involved in the trade or part of the enticement for Howard to re-sign.

From Curry's end, this is a contract year for him, and these ankle issues could affect his new deal. Golden State can sign Curry to an extension at the end of this year, and a source close to Curry said he wants an extension.

"You learn to play through it. Dell's at home right now and his ankles are as big as oranges," said Curry's mother, Sonya, referring to former NBA player Dell Curry, Stephen's father. "It's a process that he's working through, and we are confident he can do that. ... Fans hear that you're having surgery and they think, 'There won't be any problems whatsoever.' But that's not what happens. The reality is that the ankle is going to have to work itself out. As long as he can perform with it, we aren't concerned."

How bad is it?

On Dec. 20, backpedaling to the defensive end in an exhibition game against the Sacramento Kings, Curry learned the hard way he wasn't done with ankle issues. Once again, with no contact, he rolled his right ankle.

Curry sprained the ankle again Dec. 26 against the Chicago Bulls when he landed on the foot of Bulls forward Kyle Korver. Wednesday in San Antonio, Curry suffered another sprained right ankle, again without contact.

"This one is more frustrating," Curry said after Thursday's practice. "Because I took the steps to get it back to 100 percent. Last year was unexpected. This one was like a worst nightmare situation. ... I haven't been pain free since Sacramento."

Curry said after the first ankle sprain he wouldn't play again until he was 100 percent. He didn't want a repeat of last season.

But by opening day Dec. 25, after swapping practices for treatment and rest, that changed. Stanford surgeon Dr. Timothy McAdams, the Warriors' orthopedist, reviewed Curry's X-rays and MRI and concluded it was just a sprain. The results were sent to Dr. Bob Anderson, who performed the surgery on Curry in May, and he determined the repairs done in surgery remained intact.

In days, Curry was able to pass all the tests and got the green light to play in the Christmas Day opener. Then came the injury against Chicago, which forced him to miss the Dec. 28 game against New York. Again, Curry rested and received treatment. By Dec. 29, he passed the necessary tests and was cleared to play.

But this last incident has raised a ton of questions, chief among them: Why is this happening? Experts reached for this article generally pointed to three explanations.

The most likely, according to a couple, is that Curry suffers from proprioception deficit. Translated, Curry's problems are about balance and a lack of awareness about how to judge where his foot is in relation to his leg. Normally, people can tell how far to let their ankle turn, or how much weight they can put on it, without spraining it. But after an injury, proprioception problems can develop.

"It doesn't work as well because the foot can't tell the brain fast enough where it is," said Dr. Naomi Shields, a foot and ankle orthopedic surgeon in Wichita, Kan., who said she knows and thinks highly of Curry's surgeon, Anderson.

"So the brain can't tell which muscles fast enough to fire."

Another explanation is that Curry's ligaments can't hold up to the physical demands of his job, otherwise known as "functional instability."

"He can walk down the street, but he can't play basketball," said a head trainer for a Major League Baseball team, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "If he has instability, that's either because the original surgery was not effective or it might be that he's reinjured the ligaments."

The other possibility is that Curry has a degenerative condition.

"It sounds suspect," said Dr. Catherine Cheung, who through her private practice in San Francisco specializes in all aspects of foot and ankle care, including complex reconstruction. "Usually after surgery, when you tighten up the ligaments, you don't roll it anymore. It's unusual that that would keep happening. It's hard to predict that he wouldn't do it again. ... The odds are not in his favor if he's done it three times in the past two weeks. He may have to look at another surgery."

History of ankle problems

You could make the case this all began Aug. 19, 2010, in Madrid. Curry, playing with Team USA in advance of the World Championships, sprained his left ankle in practice.

Curry kept playing for the men's national team, into mid-September. That left Curry a couple of weeks to rest for training camp, which started Sept. 28. So it would make sense that Curry, compensating for his never-fully-recovered left ankle, would lean heavily on his right.

On Oct. 21, 2010, in exhibition game against the Los Angeles Lakers in San Antonio, Curry sprained his right ankle for the first time. He went through the treatment/rest dance up until the opener. He played but sprained the ankle again in the opener Oct. 27, though fairly mildly. But the next game, against the Clippers on Oct. 29, he rolled the right ankle badly enough to miss the next two games.

Curry returned and went over a month without missing action, though his ankle required constant treatment and attention. Then on Dec. 8, at San Antonio, trying to stop on a dime and change directions, he rolled his ankle again. Curry didn't return until Christmas Day.

But those two-plus weeks of rest didn't do the trick, even though Curry didn't miss another game the rest of the season.

So, this past offseason, Curry was supposed to settle this once and for all. He was seen by Dr. Mark Myerson, the director for the Institute for Foot and Ankle Reconstruction at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore. He eventually had the surgery performed by Anderson at OrthoCarolina in Charlotte, N.C., to repair two ligaments.

After four months of rehab, Curry was cleared for full activity Sept. 14.

It lasted a little over three months.

What now?

After the game Wednesday in San Antonio, Curry was despondent, so shaken by yet another sprain. Thursday, his right foot resting on a folding chair as he watched practice, he was noticeably more coherent. But his frustration hadn't waned.

He still called it the most frustrating time yet throughout this process. He still seemed to be in desperate search for answers.

Curry said the first step will be to find out exactly what it will take to get him to 100 percent.

Once it is determined what it will take, Curry said the next step is to set some parameters for what it will take to get back on the court. Whether he waits until he feels no pain at all, or waits until he can pass more stringent physical tests, Curry suggested he's not getting back on the court until he's 100 percent. But at this point, the decision might no longer be up to him.

"He's done everything he's been asked to do," coach Mark Jackson said. "But, bottom line is, we're going to make sure he gets right. It's our job as a team to hold the fort down and let the process play out. I know he's frustrated, as we all are. We're going to protect him. ... The main thing for him is to heal and get right."

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