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**game day**

1 message

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HOUSTON - Like 99 percent of the people on this planet, NBA players are creatures of habit. They find what works best for them, cater to their personal preferences and do their best to stay within their established comfort zone.

Nowhere is this pattern of behavior more pronounced than in the way it manifests itself within each player's own personal game day routine. After many years, and in some case decades, of playing the game they love, these men have figured out what their bodies and minds require to ensure peak performance when the bright lights are turned on and the opening tip is tossed into the air.

For some, like the Rockets' Kyle Lowry, the game day routine is of such vital importance that it borders on superstitious obsession. When on the road, he has to sit in the sixth row of the team bus – no questions asked. And for all games with a 7:30 PM tip time, he needs to be on the court going through his pre-game shooting routine by 4:30 PM. But as for his myriad other game day rituals? Those are off limits for fear they will no longer work if sacrificed for public consumption. And Lowry makes no effort to hide the adverse effect on his psyche should anything go awry with his routine. "I'd feel completely off," he says without even a hint of hyperbole in his voice.

For others, however, the game day routine is far more about ensuring maximum physical readiness rather than peace of mind. Hence the importance of that most sacred of NBA game day traditions: the pregame nap. When asking Rockets players about the most important part of their game day prep, finding time for a quality nap was far and away the runaway winner.

And in many ways it makes sense, too: while the majority of the working class is asked to be productive during the daytime hours, NBA players need to be at peak performance after most people have finished dinner. And amusing as it may sound at first, a nap can go a long way in ensuring that players are ready for prime time – just ask Shane Battier (and nearly every other Rockets player, for that matter), which is exactly what Rockets.com did while asking team members to divulge the most important details of their game day routine.

Shane Battier

"I need my nap. From two o'clock to four o'clock on game day I'm dead to the world. Don't even try to reach me, I'm gone. Incommunicado. I'm not superstitious, you just fall into a routine where it's just what you do at a certain time. I leave for the gym at 5:05 PM every day. I show up and have my routine. It's not like I'm rubbing rabbits feet or anything like that.

"I started doing it in college. The day is so long that, if you don't take a nap, you're just exhausted by four o'clock. So, if nothing else, a nap is just a way to waste time and shorten the day a little bit.

"That was a Coach K thing because we had a lot of 9 o'clock games and a lot of late tips, so he was big on shortening the day, sleep in for weekend games, anything to shorten the day in order to conserve your energy.

"It's our natural circadian rhythm. Most guys take naps from two to four. And even if your nap is just an hour, that's your rest time, so after doing this for a lot of years – five to 10 years – even on

practice days, my body tells me I should be taking a nap so I'm always exhausted at four o'clock in the afternoon but wide awake at 11 o'clock at night – that's just the natural rhythm of our bodies and that's why matinee games are always tough for all of us. 12 o'clock tips are brutal for us. I know everyone on the outside is like, 'It's 12 o'clock, we've done four hours of work already – you guys suck it up.' But for us, we're just getting going by then."

Chuck Hayes

"For home games, I'll leave shootaround and get a soup and salad, then go to the house, watch a little bit of SportsCenter and then fall asleep. I have to take a nap for at least an hour and a half.

"Now first thing after the game I'll eat a Snickers bar. After a long day's work I need a Snickers to kind of get me through so I don't pass out in the locker room because I only eat one meal a day on game day. I have to feel light on my feet so I can't eat after 1 o'clock. So after the game I'll have a Snickers and a real meal, but before the game I'll have one meal and that's it. I just go off the emotion and the adrenaline of the game, so I don't even think about food.

"On the road I'll eat team brunch (on game day) and that's it. Here, I'll eat a bagel, soup and salad and that's it. I can't eat anything else because I'll just feel bloated."

Courtney Lee

"Starting after shootaround, I take a shower, go home, get something to eat – chicken, rice and whatever vegetables are around – and then I take a nap for at least two hours. Then I wake up and play my brother in NBA 2K11 for two games, then I head out.

"I play with the Rockets and my brother has a couple teams he usually plays with: Oklahoma City, Dallas and New York. But I stick with the Rockets and we battle it out before every game.

"We started (this routine) when NBA 2K9 came out. We play every game day or any day when we're bored and have nothing to do. We have a tally sheet so we keep up with it for bragging rights.

"I'm killing him right now. We just brought out a new tally sheet because we had one over the summer and my number was getting too outrageous and he couldn't take it so he ripped the sheet up. So now I brought it back out and put it on the iPad, and now it's 24 to 7 for me."

Chase Budinger

"I always eat an omelet for breakfast on game day. Ham and cheese every time. There have only been a couple times when I wasn't able to. Then I would substitute it with eggs and rice, so it's really not that big of a difference.

(Note: I couldn't help asking Chase why he couldn't have an omelet when eggs were obviously available. His response: "I don't know. For some reason the omelet guy wasn't there." Fair enough. Gotta hate it when the omelet guy shirks his responsibilities.)

"If you break away from your routine, it's going to affect you a little bit. You just feel off and kind of weird, more than anything."

Kevin Martin

"I always have to wake up at 2:30. And on back to backs, the second day I have to get a lift in, just to keep the body going.

"But you know what? If you have a noon game or a 2 o'clock game, it messes everything up. Just like you saw when we had a 2 o'clock game against Milwaukee – it was so bad for both teams. You just have to go with it obviously but it is tough."

Aaron Brooks

"I've played so many bad games that I don't have any superstitions left. I try to get a nap in, but sometimes when I get a nap in I'm too tired for the game and sometimes when I don't go to sleep I feel great, so it always changes, so it doesn't really matter.

"Some times I come out and warm up and I play great. Sometimes I don't warm up and I play great, so I don't know. There's really no rhyme of reason to it."

Luis Scola

"The routine is waking up, going to shootaround, going through the shooting routine, walking through the opposing team's sets, having lunch, take a nap and then take the first bus to the arena. Start working out at the arena with 90:00 on the clock and finish around 65:00. Then get taped and then ready to go. It's just about being prepared by shooting, getting rest and getting ready for the game."

Patrick Patterson

"Right before I come to the arena I take a shower then I'll eat as soon as I arrive. Not a lot of my teammates eat but I eat a big plate of food at the 90-minute mark. I listen to music, too. Nothing specific. But shower, eat and music – that's my routine.

"I used to take a nap in college. My sophomore year, before every game I'd always take a nap. But then my junior year came around and I'd do it a little bit but some games I wouldn't play as well. Now here, I'm tired after shootaround but instead of going to sleep I'm always playing a video game or watching TV, so I never fall asleep. So taking naps isn't really part of my routine.

"If we're on the road, then I'll try to get a personal pizza or chicken. But when we're at home it's got to be pasta and a salad."

Ish Smith

"I get back from shootaround, take a nap, and I have to be downstairs in the hotel lobby by 4 o'clock for the early, early bus. I sleep for about an hour and a half, wake up around 3:30, take a shower, get all my stuff together, call my mom for a prayer before the game, and go to the gym. Shoot with [Rockets Director of Player Programs] Shawn Respert and, depending on the day, I might get a lift in. Then I go into the locker room, get something to eat, then go get taped around 55 minutes before tip-off, chill, relax, listen to my iPod, go over the scouting report and put on everything about 45 minutes before the game. Then the last thing I do is say a prayer during the national anthem.

"The only thing that throws me off if I don't get a phone call from my mom. That's one thing I did when I was in college: I had to talk to my mom – she'd encourage me, pray for me and then it's game time."

Jordan Hill

"I come in at the same time, go out on the floor at the same time, but there really isn't anything beyond that. I just go out there, play my game and have fun. I don't believe in superstition. If you love the game of basketball, you're going to go out there and give it your all every night. You're

not going to have a good game every night, but you're going to go out there and compete every time you're on the floor."

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