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SPORTS

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SECTION B

Bad luck continues: Pacers lose O'Neal

Injury will keep top scorer out eight weeks

By STEVE HERMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Jermaine O'Neal is expected to miss at least eight weeks with a left groin tear, leaving the Indiana Pacers without their leading scorer and rebounder.

The news came Thursday, a day after the Pacers acquired sharpshooter Peja Stojakovic from the Sacramento Kings for the volatile Ron Artest.

O'Neal was hurt during the fourth quarter of Indiana's loss at Cleveland on Tuesday.

"When my injury happened, I knew it was going to be serious because of the actual pop in the area where I was having the most pain the last three or four weeks," he said.

BIG LOSS

A look at Jermaine O'Neal's statistics this season and where he ranks among his Pacers teammates:

Category	Stats	Rank
Games started	33	Second
Minutes per game	35.7	Third
Field-goal pct.	46.9	Fourth
Free-throw pct.	71.4	Seventh
Rebounds per game	9.8	First
Blocks per game	2.17	First
Points per game	20.9	First

The Pacers described the injury as significant but said it was doubtful he would need surgery.

"It's hard ... being in the situation we're in and finally almost getting a new start. ... It would

have been a great opportunity to play with a guy like Stojakovic, and I think his ability helps everybody on our team," O'Neal said. "But I'm in a situation where the playoffs may be my best hope for getting back."

O'Neal did not practice Thursday but was on the court with his teammates and took several flat-footed shots at the basket as practice ended.

He said after practice he had likely come back too soon from a recent bout with pneumonia. It left him weakened, he said, forcing him to place too much stress on the groin area to protect an earlier injury to his ankle.

"When you are hurt and try to come back too early, you over-

(SEE INJURY, PAGE B4)



AP PHOTO

The Pacers' Jermaine O'Neal talks to reporters Thursday in Indianapolis. O'Neal will miss at least eight weeks with a torn left groin.

Artest took awful image with him

Salvaging the season isn't the only project the Indiana Pacers can undertake now that Ron Artest is someone else's headache.

With his departure, the Pacers can also start cleaning their soiled image.

Artest left it a tarnished mess. Before the outbursts, before the flagrant, before the suspensions and before the brawl, the franchise was hailed as a model of class and organization.

And rightfully so. Owners didn't meddle. Basketball people made basketball decisions. Wins were frequent. Sellouts were common. Players stayed out of the news for the right reasons. Then along came Artest.

A team that had no bad citizens suddenly embraced one that would



Rick Morwick

PACERS BEAT

become the worst in the NBA.

The Pacers are still paying the price, and not just in terms of wins and losses.

Forget the throw-away seasons caused by Artest's disruptions. Time will take care of winning. The Pacers will regroup, get healthy and at some point (probably next season) will get back

(SEE IMAGE, PAGE B4)

PREP BASKETBALL

Trojans' tall task

Center Grove boys ready to face Lawrence North's Oden

Center Grove High School senior center Todd Price has been asked the question all week.

How do you defend Greg Oden?

Price has never guarded the Mr. Basketball frontrunner, who is widely regarded as the nation's top high school player.

But Price isn't worried or intimidated.

He simply plans to play tough defense and hope for the best against Lawrence North's Oden, a senior center who was the 2005 National High School Player of the Year.

"There's not a lot you can do to defend somebody like that," Price said. "You try to body him up, double-team him and try to play the best defense you can play and try to get stop after stop."

Class 4A No. 1 Lawrence North hosts Center Grove at 7:30 p.m. Saturday. The two-time defending state champion Wildcats (15-0, 3-0 Metropolitan Interscholastic Conference) have won 30 straight

games and could become the state's first 4A team to win three straight state championships.

This season, the Wildcats are beating teams by an average margin of nearly 25 points per game. And Oden is a major reason why.

Oden, at 7 feet and 245 pounds, stands above most players his age. This year, the Ohio State-bound star is averaging almost 22 points and 11 rebounds per game, up from last year's averages of 20 points and 9.6 rebounds.

But the Trojans' task will be even more daunting due to their lack of height.

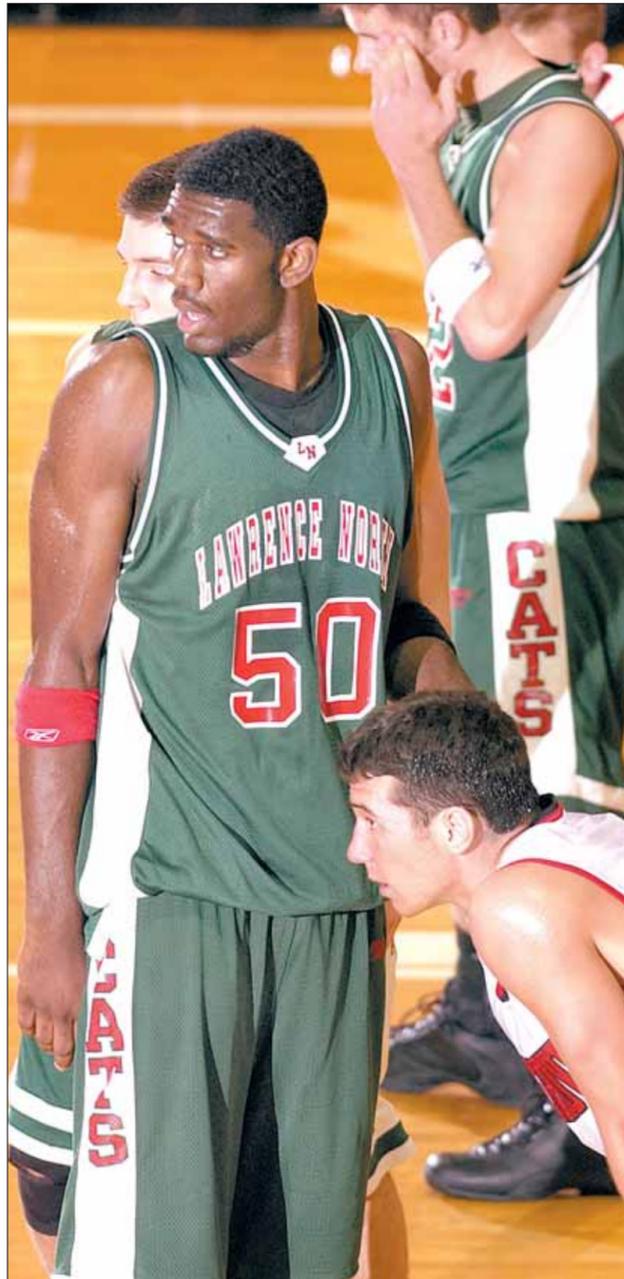
At 6-6, Price is Center Grove's tallest player. He's followed by junior forward Mitch Deffner at 6-5.

Center Grove coach Cliff Hawkins knows the Trojans face a difficult challenge trying to contain Oden. But he has a plan: confuse the standout player with

(SEE TASK, PAGE B3)

STORY BY JOHN GROTH

PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERSON



Lawrence North center Greg Oden waits for the ball to be brought up court during a game last season at Center Grove. The Wildcats host the Trojans on Saturday.

Purdue still unbeaten in Big Ten

The Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE

Katie Gearlds scored 23 points, and Aya Traore added 17 to lead No. 8 Purdue to a 73-53 win against 16th-ranked Michigan State on Thursday night.

Lindsay Wisdom-Hylton added 11 points, seven rebounds and seven steals for the Boilermakers.

Liz Shimek led Michigan State with 14 points and 10 rebounds.

Purdue (16-2, 8-0 Big Ten) reached the halfway point of the conference schedule unbeaten and notched its fourth win against a ranked team this season.

It was Michigan State's second loss to a top 10 team this week. The Spartans (14-7, 4-4) fell to No. 7 Ohio State 67-65 Sunday on a last-second shot by Jessica Davenport.

Michigan State led Purdue 14-9 early, but the Boilermakers outscored the Spartans 29-12 the rest of the first half to lead 38-26 at the break.

Purdue made 6 of 11 3-pointers and forced 11 turnovers before halftime.

Gearlds had 12 points and four assists in the first half.

Shimek scored six straight points at the beginning of the second half to cut Purdue's lead to 38-32, but the Boilermakers quickly bounced back with a 7-0 run.



AP PHOTO

Purdue's Katie Gearlds puts up a shot in the lane during the second half of Thursday's Big Ten game against visiting Michigan State.

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