KEVIN DURANT HEARD the pop in his right leg over the roar of nearly 20,000 fans inside Scotiabank Arena in Toronto. Then he collapsed to the floor, holding his leg, pinching his heel.

It was the second quarter of Game 5 of the 2019 NBA Finals. As Durant sat there, a member of the Golden State Warriors, memories from his basketball career flashed before his eyes. Fearing the end of his career, or one that seemed recognizable, he gazed around the court and into the crowd, trying to soak up a final moment.

When he was helped to the locker room, Durant's foot didn't feel fully attached. Then, a doctor performed what's known as a Thompson Test to determine the integrity of the Achilles tendon, an essential band of tissue that helps connect calf muscles to the heel. Patients lie face down, with their feet hanging off the edge of a table or a bed, and a doctor squeezes the calf to see if the foot moves. If it doesn't, then that tendon is likely torn.

Inside the room, the doctor squeezed Durant's right calf -- nothing moved. The doctor looked around at other specialists, at nearby Warriors officials who looked on. The room fell silent. Doubt soon crept in. "This is career-ending, I'm done," Durant recalled thinking. Even if he came back, maybe he'd only average 15 points a game, maybe a few more -- maybe.

The 2023-24 regular season is complete, and the postseason is underway. We have everything you need to follow along for another epic title chase.

"That's what I was thinking," he told ESPN, "because that's all I was hearing, that this s--- is over."

The events of five years ago still serve as a flashbulb memory for Durant. He remembers them vividly.

What followed in the weeks, months and years ahead -- a series of tedious milestones, starting with learning to walk again, learning to run again, learning to jump again -- represent an unheralded aspect of Durant's Hall of Fame career: an unrelenting burn to return not just to the player he was, but to one more efficient and effective than before. Each milestone felt momentous and hard-won, and this season, Durant reached another, when he played 75 regular-season games, his first time playing that many since 2018-19.

Now, in his second season with the Phoenix Suns, down 2-0 in the first round of the playoffs to the Minnesota Timberwolves, Durant will be called upon to help save a teetering season, with Game 3 coming Friday night in Phoenix (10:30 p.m. ET, ESPN).

SUNS OWNER MAT ISHBIA went all-in for Durant in February 2023, sending Mikal Bridges, Cam Johnson, four first-round draft picks and a 2028 first-round pick swap to the Brooklyn Nets in exchange for the star swingman. Then, a few months later, the Suns dealt for star guard Bradley Beal.

With their new Big Three of Durant, Beal and star shooting guard Devin Booker, the Suns seemed poised for championship contention, but injuries and uneven play have interfered. Through it all, Durant has been the constant, averaging 27.1 points in 37.2 minutes this season, during which he made his 14th NBA All-Star appearance.