

= Pacers ? Pistons brawl =

The Pacers ? Pistons brawl (colloquially known as the Malice at the Palace) was an altercation that occurred in a National Basketball Association (NBA) game between the Indiana Pacers and the Detroit Pistons on November 19 , 2004 , at The Palace of Auburn Hills in Auburn Hills , Michigan . The Associated Press (AP) called it " the most infamous brawl in NBA history " .

With less than a minute left in the game , a fight broke out on the court between several players . After the fight was broken up , a fan threw a drink from the stands at Pacers player Ron Artest while he was lying on the scorer 's table . Artest then entered the crowd and sparked a massive brawl between players and fans that stretched onto the court .

After the game , the NBA suspended nine players for a total of 146 games , which led to \$ 11 million in salary being lost by the players . Five players were also charged with assault , and eventually sentenced to a year of probation and community service . Five fans also faced criminal charges and were banned from attending Pistons home games for life . The fight also led the NBA to increase security between players and fans , and to limit the sale of alcohol in games .

= = Before the brawl = =

The meeting was the first between the two teams since the previous season 's Eastern Conference Finals , which the Pistons won in six games en route to their first NBA title since the " Bad Boys " era of the late 1980s and early 1990s . This caused the game to receive much hype from the media and fans . Having won two games in a row , the Pacers came into the game with a 6 ? 2 record , while the Pistons , the defending champions , began their season 4 ? 3 . The game was televised nationally on ESPN , as well as on the Pacers ' and Pistons ' local broadcast affiliates , Fox Sports Midwest and WDIV (Detroit 's NBC affiliate) , respectively .

The game , like many previous meetings between the two teams , was dominated by defense . The Pacers got off to a quick start , opening up a 20 @-@ point lead with seven minutes to go before halftime . The Pistons managed to cut into the lead , trailing by 16 points by halftime . The Pistons opened the third quarter with a 9 ? 2 run , but the Pacers ended it with a buzzer @-@ beating three @-@ pointer and a layup from Jamaal Tinsley heading into the fourth quarter . Richard Hamilton and Lindsey Hunter started the last quarter with consecutive three @-@ point field goals , as the Pistons cut into the lead again . But Stephen Jackson 's back @-@ to @-@ back field goals pushed the lead back to 93 ? 79 with 3 : 52 remaining , essentially putting the Pistons away . Despite the lopsided score near the end of the game , most key players on both teams remained in the game .

The Pacers were led by the 24 @-@ point effort of Ron Artest , who scored 17 in the first quarter . Jermaine O 'Neal notched a double @-@ double with 20 points and 13 rebounds . Tinsley had 13 points , eight assists and a career @-@ high eight steals . Hamilton led the Pistons with 20 points . Rasheed Wallace and Ben Wallace both recorded a double @-@ double . Despite being outrebounded by the Pistons , the Pacers managed to shoot 41 % from the field .

= = Altercation = =

The brawl began with 45 @.@ 9 seconds remaining in the game , when Indiana led 97 ? 82 . The Pistons ' Ben Wallace was fouled hard from behind by the Pacers ' Ron Artest (now known as Metta World Peace) , who slapped him across the back of the head during a layup attempt . Wallace later said that Artest had warned him he would be hit . Wallace responded by shoving Artest in the face with both hands , causing players from both teams to quickly get in between them as they attempted to keep Wallace and Artest separated .

Pistons coach Larry Brown was not yet very concerned , because fights in the NBA rarely lasted for more than a few seconds . During the altercation , Artest lay down on the scorer 's table to relax while putting on a headset to speak with Pacers radio broadcaster Mark Boyle . The microphone was not live . Boyle recalled that the broadcasting team knew Artest 's personality and " there was no way we were going to put an open mic in front of [him] in that situation " . Pacers president

Donnie Walsh later stated that Artest was following advice he had received on how to calm down and avoid trouble in a volatile situation . After unsuccessfully attempting to break up the confrontation , referees prepared to eject various players before the game resumed . Sportscaster Mike Breen , calling the game for ESPN , believed Wallace would be ejected , while Bill Walton was of the opinion that Stephen Jackson should be ejected as well , for shouting at the Pistons players and aggravating the situation . However , Breen expressed concern that , if ejected , Wallace would have to walk past the Pacers bench , which could trigger another incident .

Ninety seconds after Wallace shoved Artest , most of both teams ' players and coaches were huddled at midcourt , attempting to calm down Wallace (Tayshaun Prince was the only player on either team to not leave the bench during the entire incident ; others became automatically eligible for one @-@ game suspensions) . While Artest was lying on the table , Wallace threw a towel at him , causing Artest to briefly stand up before being held back by coaches . A spectator , John Green , then threw a plastic cup of Diet Coke at Artest , hitting him in the chest . Artest jumped off the table , ran into the stands , and grabbed a man , Michael Ryan , who he mistakenly believed was responsible . Boyle stood up to try and hold back Artest and was trampled in the effort , suffering five fractured vertebrae and a gouge on his head . Jackson followed Artest into the stands and punched a fan , William Paulson , in the face in retaliation for the man throwing another drink in Artest 's face while he was being restrained by other spectators . Pacers players Eddie Gill , David Harrison , Reggie Miller , Fred Jones , and Jamaal Tinsley , the Pistons ' Rasheed Wallace , and numerous personnel (including Pistons radio analyst and former player Rick Mahorn) also quickly entered the stands to retrieve Artest and Jackson , and to break up the fighting . Green punched Artest twice in the head from behind , as did Ben Wallace 's brother , David , to Jones . More fans then began throwing drinks and other objects , while a number of fans spilled out onto the court .

As Artest walked out of the stands , he was confronted by two more fans , Alvin " A.J. " Shackleford and Charlie Haddad , who ran onto the court . Artest punched Shackleford in the face , causing Haddad to intervene by pushing away Artest , before both fans fell over . While Haddad was on the ground , Anthony Johnson struck him in the back of the head . As Haddad stood up , Jermaine O 'Neal punched him in the jaw after a running start , while slipping in liquid and falling backwards , causing witnesses Scot Pollard , ESPN sideline reporter Jim Gray , and a Pistons executive , Tom Wilson , to briefly fear that O 'Neal would kill Haddad . O 'Neal later claimed that Haddad had been asked to leave the arena earlier that night , and was well @-@ known to security because of claims that he wanted to fight an NBA player in order to receive compensation . William Wesley , Austin Croshere , and Miller pulled Artest away from the fans , but the scene became chaotic as outnumbered arena security struggled to reestablish order . Although Auburn Hills police had plans to handle many disorders , and had three officers in the arena , they were unprepared for players entering the stands .

Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said after the game , " I felt like I was fighting for my life out there . " One reporter who attempted to stop Tinsley from entering the stands recalled that the player " went through me like I was butter " , and former NBA Commissioner David Stern , watching the game on TV , recalled that he said , " Holy [mouths a swear word] . " (O 'Neal later said , " As bad as it looked on TV , it was at least 20 times worse in person . ") Pacers assistant coach Chuck Person compared the situation to being " trapped in a gladiator @-@ type scene where the fans were the lions and we were just trying to escape with our lives . That 's how it felt . That there was no exit . That you had to fight your way out . " Players ' children and others in the audience cried from fear and shock . Derrick Coleman stood near Brown and Brown 's ball boy son to protect them . The remaining seconds of the game were called off and the Pacers were awarded the 97 ? 82 win . Fans booed the Indiana players as they were escorted from the court by officials and security , and continued to throw beverages and other objects (including a folding chair that nearly hit O 'Neal) at them as they walked under the tunnel to the locker room . No players from either team spoke to the media before leaving the arena . Eventually , police officers were able to swarm the arena , threatening to handcuff those who wouldn 't leave . Nine spectators were injured , and two were taken to the hospital .

In the Pacers ' locker room , O 'Neal and Carlisle nearly got into a fight over the coaches trying to

restrain the players when they were defending themselves . Artest asked Jackson whether he thought the players would get in trouble . Jackson responded , " We 'll be lucky if we have a freaking job . " The conversation convinced an amazed Jackson and Pollard that Artest " wasn 't in his right mind , to ask that question " . Auburn Hills police entered the locker room to make arrests , but the team rushed Artest onto the bus and refused to take him off . The police decided to protect the Pacers as they left the arena and to later contact the team after reviewing game film . Outside of the arena , there were dozens of police cruisers lining the roads out of the parking lots .

= = Charges = =

= = = Suspensions = = =

On November 20 , 2004 , the NBA suspended Artest , Jackson , O 'Neal , and Wallace indefinitely , saying that their actions were " shocking , repulsive , and inexcusable " . The following day , the NBA announced that nine players would be suspended for a total of what eventually became 146 games ? 137 games for Pacers players and nine games for Pistons players . David Harrison was also seen fighting with fans , but the NBA stated that he wouldn 't be suspended because " the incident occurred as the players were attempting to leave the floor " .

Artest was given the longest suspension ; he was suspended for the remainder of the 2004 ? 05 NBA season , a suspension that eventually totaled 86 games (73 regular season and 13 subsequent playoff games) , the longest suspension for an on @-@ court incident in NBA history . The players suspended also lost in excess of \$ 11 million in salary due to the suspensions , with Artest alone losing almost \$ 5 million .

In the week following the announcement of the suspensions , the players ' union appealed the suspensions of Artest , Jackson , and O 'Neal , saying they thought that commissioner Stern had " exceeded his authority " . (Jackson felt that despite losing millions the players were fortunate , however , as Stern could have expelled them from the league .) A federal arbitrator upheld the full length of all suspensions , except that of O 'Neal , which was reduced to 15 games . However , the NBA appealed the decision of the arbitrator to reduce O 'Neal 's suspension in federal court , and on December 24 , a judge issued a temporary injunction allowing O 'Neal to play , until a full hearing was held on the NBA 's appeal .

O 'Neal played in two more games before the NBA 's case was brought before the U.S. District Court in Brooklyn , New York on December 30 . The NBA argued that under the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) , Stern had absolute authority to hand out suspensions and hear appeals for all on @-@ court incidents . But the judge ruled that because O 'Neal 's behavior was an off @-@ court incident , arbitration was allowed under the CBA , and thus the arbitrator was within his rights to reduce the suspension . Despite O 'Neal 's successful appeal , no further appeals were made to reduce Artest 's and Jackson 's suspensions .

= = = Legal charges = = =

Green was identified by county prosecutor John Gorcyca , who had been his neighbor . On November 30 , Palace Sports and Entertainment , the owner of the Pistons , banned Green and Haddad from attending any events at Palace properties (including the Palace of Auburn Hills and the DTE Energy Music Theatre) , revoked their season tickets and issued them refunds . Green had several previous criminal convictions , including counterfeiting , carrying a concealed weapon , felony assault , and three drunken driving convictions , and he was on court @-@ ordered probation from a DUI conviction at the time of the brawl .

On December 8 , 2004 , five Indiana players and five fans (John Ackerman , John Green , Bryant Jackson , William Paulson , and David Wallace , Ben Wallace 's brother) were charged for assault and battery . Player O 'Neal (who also threw usher Melvin Kendziorski onto the scorer 's table when attempting to enter the stands) and spectator Green , who Gorcyca said " single @-@ handedly

incited " the brawl by throwing a cup of liquid at Artest , were charged with two counts , and Artest , Harrison , Jackson , and Anthony Johnson were charged with one count each . Three fans , including David Wallace , received one count of the same charge ; two fans (Haddad and Shackleford) who entered the court during the fight were charged with trespassing , and Bryant Jackson , who had prior criminal convictions , was charged with felony assault for throwing a chair . All of the fans involved were banned from attending Pistons games .

On March 29 , 2005 , Bryant Jackson pleaded no contest to a felony assault charge for throwing the chair , and on May 3 , 2005 , he was sentenced to two years probation and ordered to pay \$ 6 @ , @ 000 in restitution . David Wallace was also convicted , and sentenced to one year of probation and community service for punching Pacers guard Fred Jones from behind .

All five players who were charged pleaded no contest to the charges . On September 23 , 2005 , Artest , Jackson , and O 'Neal were all sentenced to one year on probation , 60 hours of community service , a \$ 250 fine , and anger management counseling . A week later , Harrison received the same sentence , and on October 7 , 2005 , Johnson , the last player to be charged , received a similar sentence (he was ordered to serve 100 hours of community service) .

On March 27 , 2006 , a jury found Green guilty on one count of assault and battery for punching Artest in the stands , but acquitted him of an assault charge for throwing the cup . On May 1 , 2006 , Green was sentenced to 30 days in jail and two years ' probation . On November 7 , 2006 , the Pistons issued a letter to Green informing him that he was banned for life from attending any Pistons home games under orders from the NBA (although the ban does not extend to other events at the Palace of Auburn Hills) .

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Public reaction = = =

Several NBA players and coaches said the brawl was the worst fight they had ever seen . Pacers fans began to refer to the team as " the Thugs " . Pistons CEO Tom Wilson later stated that Artest 's action took away physical barriers , such as tables and benches , that normally separate fans and players , and Indianapolis Star reporter Mark Montieth claimed that " in a way , [Artest] provoked [the forthcoming assault] passively by lying down " . In the post @ - @ game commentary on ESPN 's NBA Shootaround , ESPN 's studio analysts laid the blame on the Pistons ' fans instead of on the players . John Saunders of ESPN referred to the fans as " a bunch of punks " . Tim Legler said that " the fans crossed the line " . Stephen A. Smith stated that " some of them (the fans) should be arrested as far as I 'm concerned " . Their commentary prompted ESPN vice president Mark Shapiro to place calls to host Saunders , as well as analysts Legler , Smith , and Greg Anthony . Shapiro felt their commentary was biased . The following Tuesday , Shapiro stated , " I wish the studio hadn 't laid the blame solely on the backs of the fans Friday night . "

Although a significant portion of media criticism was directed at the Pistons fans , 46 % of the voters in the ESPN SportsNation poll believed that the fans were to blame for the incident . Other commentators said that Artest and the other players involved were to blame .

= = = Events after the brawl = = =

The Pacers and Pistons played for the first time after the brawl on December 25 at the Conseco Fieldhouse in Indianapolis . The Pistons won 98 ? 93 without any incidents . Neither Artest nor Jackson played due to their suspensions ; O 'Neal played in his first game back after the arbitrator reduced his suspension to 15 games . Three months later , on February 17 , 2005 , the NBA imposed new security guidelines for all NBA arenas . The new policies included a size limit of 24 US fl oz (710 ml) for alcohol purchases and a hard cap of two alcoholic beverage purchases for any individual person , as well as a ban of alcohol sales after the end of the third quarter . They also later ordered that each team put at least three security guards between the players and the fans .

On March 25 , 2005 , the Pacers played at The Palace for the first time since the brawl . The game was delayed 90 minutes after a series of bomb threats were aimed at the Pacers locker room , but the game eventually started after no explosives were found . Two of the key figures in the original incident missed the game , as Artest was still suspended and O 'Neal had an injured shoulder . In the game , the Pacers stopped the Pistons ' twelve @-@ game winning streak with a 94 ? 81 win .

In the playoffs , Detroit entered as the second seed of the Eastern Conference , and Indiana as the sixth . After the Pistons defeated the Philadelphia 76ers in five games , and the Pacers upset the third seed Boston Celtics in seven games , the two teams met in the second round . Although the Pacers went ahead two games to one , the Pistons clinched the series in six games with three straight wins . After eliminating Indiana , Detroit defeated the Miami Heat in the Eastern Conference Finals in seven games , then advanced to the NBA Finals , where they lost to the San Antonio Spurs in seven games .

After serving his suspension of the rest of the 2004 ? 05 season , Ron Artest returned to the Pacers at the beginning of the 2005 ? 06 season . After playing 16 games he demanded to be traded , and the Pacers put him on the injured list . The Pacers ' Walsh said that Artest 's demands were " the last straw " , and many Pacers players who had fought in the brawl to help their teammate felt betrayed . Jackson later said , " I put my career on the line for him , going into the stands and fighting ... I lost \$ 3 million [but] there was no ' thank you ' or nothing . " After more than a month of inactivity , Indiana traded Artest to the Sacramento Kings for Peja Stojakovi? . Artest faced Ben Wallace for the first time after the fight in November 2006 , and finally made his return to Detroit in January 2007 . During the Kings ' 91 ? 74 loss to the Pistons , Artest was booed constantly , but there were no unusual incidents . After a year 's stop with the Houston Rockets in the 2008 ? 09 season , Artest signed with the Los Angeles Lakers . After winning his first NBA championship in 2010 , Artest apologized to Jackson and other Pacers for being " so young and egotistical " , stating " sometimes I feel like a coward when I see those guys . I 'm on the Lakers , but I had a chance to win with you guys . I feel almost like a coward . " On September 16 , 2011 , Artest legally changed his name to Metta World Peace .

During the 2011 ? 12 season , only one of the nine players that were suspended after the brawl was still with his original team : Ben Wallace , who signed with the Chicago Bulls as a free agent in 2006 , later traded to the Cleveland Cavaliers , and rejoined the Pistons on August 7 , 2009 . Most of the players involved were traded to other teams , and since then all the players , minus Artest , have retired . The Pistons advanced to four straight Eastern Conference Finals after the brawl , and six straight overall , making them the first team since the Los Angeles Lakers in the 1980s to advance to six straight conference finals though they only won the championship once in that streak . However , after losing to the Pistons in the 2005 playoffs , the Pacers failed to finish above .500 until the 2011 ? 12 season and missed the playoffs for five straight seasons from 2006 through 2010 . Many Pacers from the 2004 ? 05 season believe that the brawl and its consequences ruined a potential championship team , with Artest as the cause . The Pacers have attempted to rebuild by obtaining " character guys " as players .

On November 19 , 2009 , John Green , one of the fans who helped begin the brawl , appeared on ESPN First Take , where he talked about the incident and the changes he had made since then . Green recounted that he had an alcohol problem at the time and had since made an effort to deal with that . He also said that Ron Artest had apologized to him several months earlier , and wished to work together in some type of community service in Detroit .