

Magic Johnson Abruptly Resigns as Lakers' President

By **GREG BEACHAM**
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LOS ANGELES (AP)—Magic Johnson abruptly quit as the Los Angeles Lakers' president of basketball operations Tuesday night, citing his desire to return to the simpler life he enjoyed as a wealthy businessman and beloved former player before taking charge of this tempestuous franchise just over two years ago.

Johnson didn't tell owner Jeanie Buss or general manager Rob Pelinka about his shocking decision before he announced it in front of reporters about 90 minutes before the final game of the Lakers' sixth consecutive losing season.

Los Angeles, which is missing the NBA playoffs yet again despite the offseason addition of LeBron James, played well after Johnson's announcement, but still



Magic Johnson speaks to reporters prior to an NBA basketball game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Portland Trail Blazers on Tuesday, April 9, 2019, in Los Angeles. Johnson abruptly quit as the Lakers' president of basketball operations Tuesday night, citing his desire to return to the simpler life he enjoyed as a wealthy businessman and beloved former player before taking charge of the franchise just over two years ago. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

lost 104-101 to Portland.

"I want to go back to having fun," Johnson said, fighting off tears. "I want to go back to being who I was before taking on this job. We're halfway there with LeBron coming (last summer). I think this summer, with that other star coming in, whoever is going to bring him in, I think this team is really going to be in position to contend for a championship with the growth of the young players."

Johnson didn't directly tie his decision to the future of Luke Walton, but the third-year coach was widely expected to be fired by Johnson. Without using names, Johnson repeatedly mentioned Buss' affinity for Walton, who was in place before

Johnson got his job in February 2017, and Johnson's desire not to cause upheaval between the owner and her chosen coach.

"(On Wednesday) I would have to affect somebody's livelihood and their life," Johnson said. "And I thought about it and I said, 'That's not fun for me. That's not who I am.' And then I don't want to put her in the middle of us, even though she said, 'Hey, you can do what you want to do.' I know she has great love for him and great love for me."

Johnson and Buss had a three-hour meeting Monday about the direction of the 16-time NBA champion Lakers, who haven't made the postseason since 2013.

Magic claimed he didn't finalize his decision until Tuesday morning.

"Somebody is going to have to tell my boss, because I know she's going to be sick," Johnson said. "But I knew I couldn't face her face-to-face and tell her."

Buss didn't attend the Lakers' season finale, although Johnson waited by the executive parking area at Staples Center in hopes of seeing her. Buss tweeted her reaction at halftime.

"Earvin, I loved working side by side with you," Buss wrote. "You've brought us a long way. We will continue the journey. We love you."

Walton, who is 98-148 in three seasons, refused to say much about

Johnson's announcement after the loss to Portland: "I found out when you guys did. It was 80 minutes before the game ... and I haven't had any time to really process it."

Clearly blindsided by Johnson's announcement, the Lakers also issued a team statement at halftime.

"There is no greater Los Angeles Laker than Earvin Johnson," it said. "We are deeply grateful to Magic for all that he has done for our franchise as a player, an ambassador and an executive. ... He will always be not only a Lakers icon, but our family. As we begin the process of moving forward, we will work in a measured and methodical fashion to make the right moves for the future of our organization."

Johnson's desire for his old life wasn't the only reason for his departure. He also said he is tired of being investigated or fined by the NBA for tampering when he comments on basketball on Twitter or even speaks to another organization's player.

Johnson, a long-time broadcaster and respected basketball figure before moving into the front office, has been investigated four times for tampering after everything from a joking comment about Paul George on Jimmy Kimmel's talk show to his

response to an email sent to him by Philadelphia's Ben Simmons.

"I thought about Dwyane Wade retiring (Wednesday), and I can't even tweet that out or be there," Johnson said. "Serena Williams called me a week ago and said, 'Will you mentor me and be on my advisory board?' And I said, 'Yeah, I'm going to do that.' So when Ben Simmons called and we went through the proper channels and they made me look like the bad guy out of that situation, but I didn't do anything wrong ... I was thinking about all those times, all those guys who want me to mentor them or be a part of their lives, and I can't even do that. I had more fun on the other side."

Johnson and Rob Pelinka, Kobe Bryant's former agent, didn't know each other before they were paired by Buss, but Johnson said he worked well with Pelinka. Johnson also pointedly refused to say whether Pelinka should remain as the Lakers' general manager, saying the decision rested solely with Buss, whom he repeatedly called "my sister."

"She doesn't know I'm standing here," Johnson said. "Because I knew I would be crying like a baby in front of her."



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