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Did a Faulty Cigar Cutter Break Up the Best Basketball Team of All Time?

A freak accident clouded the end of his time with the Bulls. But did it break up the team?

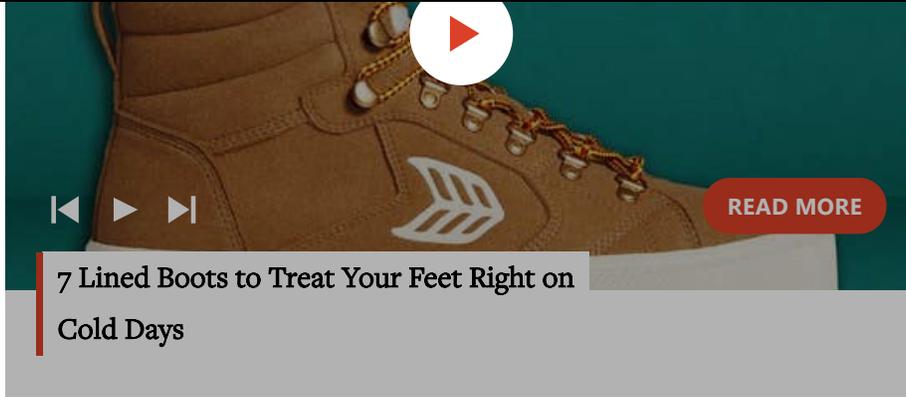
By [Cameron LeBlanc](#)
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Chicago Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf gave [Michael Jordan](#) [his first cigar](#) after [the Bulls won their first championship in 1991](#), inaugurating a lifelong hobby for the superstar. By 1993, Jordan was smoking one before every home game, and in a 2017 interview he claimed to smoke [half a dozen cigars daily](#).

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All this smoking isn't great for Jordan's health, but the most controversial ill effect of his habit happened on a trip he took to the Bahamas in the first days of 1999 as the NBA lockout dragged into its seventh month. It was there that he attempted to cut a cigar with what he later called a "cheap cutter." It broke when Jordan pressed it down and the blade dug into his right index finger.

Jordan sliced a tendon, and the injury required two surgeries to repair. He was left with nerve damage that made it difficult to palm a basketball. It likely would have caused Jordan to miss the majority of the lockout-shortened season, but he publicly announced his retirement, finger visibly bandaged, on January 13, 1999, a week before the lockout, ironically the reason he could be in the Bahamas in January without having retired already, ended.

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Reporters and fans questioned whether Jordan's injury was a factor in his decision to leave the NBA. He's always answered



that never had any factors in terms of my decision.”

And while it’s tempting to latch onto a conspiracy theory around these events, the simple fact is that it’s impossible to prove him wrong, particularly when no one who would know has come forward to say otherwise and the whole of the situation surrounding the Bulls at the time suggests that a break-up was on its way.

Jordan had pledged to only play for Phil Jackson, who’d been retained on a one-year contract the previous year only when Reinsdorf flew to his home in Montana. GM Jerry Krause infamously told Jackson that he could go 82-0 and not be invited back. A disrespected Jackson made “the last dance” the theme of

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least for him.

The Bulls also had lots of players, from star Scottie Pippen to role player Steve Kerr, who were due for new, much larger contracts. Keeping the team together would’ve been expensive for Reinsdorf, and in *The Last Dance* he makes it clear that finances were a big part of his decision-making.

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The team was hurtling toward a rebuild, and the weight of the evidence suggests that even if Jordan hadn’t sliced open his finger, the dynasty would have come to an end.

That means the real question isn’t “Did Jordan slicing his finger open break up the Bulls?” but “Would Jordan’s injury have