



Dental Matters

Ask Fred VanVleet about guarding teeth



ike many of you, I watched a lot of basketball over the past two months.

In fact, I would say pretty close to every minute of every Raptors game over their magical playoff run to their first ever NBA Championship.

There were many memorable moments during the quest for the title, perhaps none more iconic than 'The Shot' by Kawhi Leonard that beat the buzzer to win game seven against the Sixers.

And who can forget the image of Fred VanVleet, lying motionless on the floor and bleeding from a gash under his right eye after an accidental elbow to the face in Game 4 against Golden State.

While all eyes were on VanVleet, hoping for the best while fearing something worse, an incredibly astute camera operator somehow found and zoomed in on a fragment of VanVleet's front tooth lying on the court.

The story, as we all know very well, has a wonderful ending.

Fred VanVleet did not sustain a concussion, had an incredible series, and scored a playoff careerhigh 22 points, including 12 points in the decisive fourth quarter of the championship-clinching Game 6

You might be wondering how the dental injury occurred if VanVleet was hit under his right eye with an elbow.

I have watched the replay of that sequence many times, and it is clear to me that the elbow to the cheek did not cause the tooth fracture.

More likely, when VanVleet's

head hit the ground, his lower jaw snapped shut forcefully, causing the tooth to fracture. Would the tooth have fractured if he was wearing a mouthguard? No, it would not have.

To VanVleet's credit, he came out for Game 5 sporting a brand new mouthguard.

And, unlike a certain very well known Golden State Warriors player who chews his mouthguard like it is a piece of gum, VanVleet actually wore his mouthguard in a way that protects his teeth while playing.

I have been preaching the ben-

efits of wearing a mouthguard to patients who play contact sports, be it at the competitive or recreational level.

However, VanVleet did more to promote mouthguard wear in the last three games of the NBA finals than I have in my entire dental career.

Here's a salute to all of the players, coaches and management of the Toronto Raptors organization who have brought a professional sports championship to Toronto and made all of us so very proud. And a special salute to my new dental hero, Fred VanVleet.