

Global Media Conference Call

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Mark Tatum



MODERATOR: Thank you all for joining today's global conference call with NBA Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer Mark Tatum to discuss tomorrow's NBA season restart.

MARK TATUM: Hello, everyone, and thank you all for joining today. I know we have people in all time zones around the world, and let me thank all of you for your continued coverage of the NBA and especially for informing and educating the public these last few months about our season hiatus and restart.

This is a great time of excitement and anticipation. We're just about 34 hours away from restarting the 2019-2020 season, and it's been a pretty monumental task, not just the negotiations but the planning, the logistics for our Disney campus, but concluding then all during a time of tremendous social unrest in the U.S. and in the midst of a worldwide pandemic that has impacted all of us.

We have worked in close consultation with our medical experts, with public health officials. We've developed an extensive list of protocols to keep everyone on our campus healthy and safe, which is our top priority, and so far they appear to be working.

When our season resumes tomorrow, our games will reach fans in 215 countries and territories in 47 different languages through television, computers, mobile phones and tablets, and there will be some never-before-seen virtual fan experiences that we're excited about introducing.

They will see a game where the global influence is obvious. 89 international players from 34 different countries and territories are participating in this restart, and every single one of the 22 teams in the restart has at least one international player.

They include some of the best players in our game. A record eight of them were 2020 NBA All-Stars, including our reigning MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, our reigning Rookie of the Year Luka Dončić, our reigning Defensive Player of the Year Rudy Gobert, and our reigning Most Improved Player Pascal Siakam.

The restart will also offer new viewing experiences for fans

around the world. We've been very focused on how fans engage with our game, and we've worked with our broadcast and technology partners to develop in-venue and broadcast enhancements. You'll see more camera angles, more microphones picking up different sounds, and D.J.'s and announcers that will be replicating the sounds and experiences that teams are accustomed to hearing in their arenas.

We're also going to debut something called "together mode," which is an immersive virtual experience for fans that's a result of our new partnerships with Microsoft and Michelob Ultra.

Let me just reiterate that this is such an exciting time. We can't wait to get started. We can't wait to get back on the court, and I'll just stop there, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have about the restart and any other questions regarding the NBA.

Q. You did some interesting experiments, the league, with NBA League Pass during the hiatus, and it strikes me that for an international audience, particularly if the NBA will not have to have game day revenue as part of their business model, that League Pass begins to have a more important role in the business model of the NBA. What are the plans, not in the short-term but really long-term, to have more and more of the NBA content available to other countries in their native languages?

MARK TATUM: Yeah, so it's a great question. As you said, this pandemic has caused us to innovate because the reality is 99 percent of our fans never step foot in an NBA arena anyway, and now we're in a situation where 100 percent of our fans are not stepping foot in the arena. So it really is critical and important that we do everything we can to create this immersive, engaging experience for our fans, both here in the U.S. but even more importantly internationally.

We're doing that with, like I mentioned, some of the elements that I mentioned earlier. But I think in language, for example, in Brazil we're looking at League Pass in not only English but Spanish but in Portuguese, in making our games available -- all of our games, by the way, will be available either with our broadcast partners or on League Pass, so the accessibility of our games, the availability of



different camera angles.

So one of the other benefits or features I should say of playing these games in Orlando is that we're going to be able to place cameras in places where we normally might not be able to place them, and so we've got a rail hand, for example, we're putting cameras in to replicate the kind of courtside experience 10 rows back from the court. There will be some 30 cameras that are available around the court to get different camera angles, and then there will be enhanced audio, as well.

We're going to have influencers who are going to be calling games on League Pass, so you can watch the game and listen to your favorite influencer. So I think this level of customization for the fan, particularly internationally, with languages, camera angles, influencers, those are the kinds of things that are going to -- that you're going to see [through] League Pass but I think will continue going forward even as we come through the pandemic.

Q. With the NBA allowing players to make statements on their jerseys and basically supporting the Black Lives Matter movement with the Black Lives Matter statement on the court and the reports today that some players may be planning to kneel during the National Anthem, has the league given any consideration rescinding the rule to require players to stand for the National Anthem?

MARK TATUM: So thanks for the question. We have had a rule in place for nearly 40 years requiring those on the playing court to stand during the National Anthem, so that's a rule that's been in place. I'll tell you, I also understand, though, the role of protests, and if that happens, we'll deal with that situation if it presents itself. But as has been the case over the past several years and in the case here where the inclusion of the Black Lives Matter message on the court, the players' social justice messages on the jerseys, we're going to work in partnership with the players on important issues like this and issues that affect and are important to the players.

Q. As we resume the NBA tomorrow, what plans do you have if it happens -- we've seen some players breaking the rules like Lou Williams and others, so what happens if you find out more teams or a team gets more positive results throughout the way? And my second question is after postponing the NBA, we also postponed the basketball Africa league. Do you have tentative dates for resumption of the Basketball Africa League?

MARK TATUM: Two great questions. So I'll answer the second one first. With respect to the Basketball Africa

League, we have not made a determination yet on the start of that season. As you might recall, we were supposed to launch that season in Senegal on March 13th through the 15th. I was supposed to be in Senegal for the launch of that. We suspended that and put that on pause, and so no -- I've been talking with our Africa office on a regular basis several times a week, and we are evaluating the situation in Africa and looking at various plans to see when we can, in fact, launch our BAL. We are looking forward to launching the BAL when it is safe to do so.

On your first question with respect to our protocols, what I would say is that we have an extensive list and extensive group of protocols that were developed in conjunction with the world's leading experts in infectious disease, in epidemiology and in virology. We've implemented those protocols, and whenever we see somebody on the campus who is not adhering to the protocols, we actually have a process to deal with that.

I would say right now, based on the results that our protocols are working. Since of the 340 -- close to -- between 340 and 350 players who have been on campus we're pleased to have had zero cases of COVID-19 positive results during that time. We understand, though, that we have a long ways to go, and I would say that the people on the campus are cognizant of adhering to the rules, adhering to the protocols to keep everybody safe and healthy.

We feel like we have a very good plan in place that was developed in consultation with our medical experts, public health experts and other officials to put a plan in place to keep everybody safe and healthy.

Q. Two hopefully very quick questions. Is there any backup plan, and God forbid there's an outbreak or the season is forced to be postponed again. Are we likely to just wipe off the season or we will just keep postponing it until we can play it? And I also wanted to know, where do you stand, as a fan of the sport, do you think it's more nerve-racking shooting that last-second free throw with silence or being bathed by 15,000 fans?

MARK TATUM: It's a great question. It's a great question. So what I would say is that on the fans, right, we are going to try to replicate an in-arena experience. So as I mentioned, the players who are at the free-throw line, they will see fans in the stands through this Microsoft Teams together mode. There will be live fans. They'll be able to see them. They'll be cheering.

The fans are going to be populated by the home team, so the home team has the responsibility of going out and



working with either season ticket holders or marketing partners, and there are also seats reserved for family members right behind the benches. We're trying to create a sense of familiarity for the players.

Now, it's going to be different than having 15,000 or 20,000 fans in the arena, but our players are world-class athletes, and they will adjust to that environment. And they have been adjusting to that environment with the scrimmage games that have been taking place over the last week.

On your first question, you know, like I said, we have a set of protocols that we've put in place, and depending on any situations that arise, we have a panel of experts, of infectious disease specialists, of epidemiologists, of virologists, and we're working with the local public health officials, and it really is case specific. So if something were to happen, we would have to dive into the specifics of that case or those cases to determine what our next steps would be.

There are so many different scenarios that could happen, but I would say that we have a process for dealing with those kind of scenarios at this point. But right now I would say, again, that our protocols are working and that we are hopeful and optimistic if everyone, again, is in compliance with the protocols that we'll be able to crown a champion at the end of the season.

Q. My question is you mentioned a lot of circumstances surrounding the NBA, like social injustice and of course the pandemic, but the NBA was able to successfully create this season restart without any major setbacks. What do you think has been the biggest contributing factor to that success?

MARK TATUM: There's two things. One is the partnership with the players. We could not do this if we did not have an incredible working relationship with the players. They have to agree that the conditions that we were creating were going to be safe and going to be healthy for them and for everybody involved. And even, as you mentioned, even around the social justice messages, that was in conjunction and in partnership with our players, as well.

We had weekly and many times several times a week, we were on calls and had meetings with the Players' Association, Michele Roberts, who's their executive director -- the partnership with the players is really important, really critical. We couldn't have done it without them. And then the second biggest contributing factor, I think, is the work that we've done with our experts because again, the safety and the health of everyone involved -- we are doing something here that we've never done before and that very few people, if anyone, have actually ever

attempted to do before, and it's a massive undertaking, and it requires a lot of cooperation with experts in lots of different areas.

I think our partnership with Disney also played a big role in this and being able to create that campus environment at these world-class facilities for the teams that are down there. So it's so many factors there.

But the partnership with the players, I think, was a huge part of this as well as our partnership with the medical community on coming up with a set of protocols that could keep everybody safe and healthy.

Q. I have two questions. First, with all the preparation for resuming the season, which part actually was the hardest one? And my second question is what do you expect from the rating on Tencent, especially now that it's the only platform in China, after resuming the season? Thank you.

MARK TATUM: I'd say the hardest part was the medical and the health and safety protocols. That was the hardest part, because we were not going to go forward if we didn't come up with a plan that we felt very, very comfortable with that would keep everybody safe and everybody healthy.

And so that took months and months and months of conversations, of trying to build something that's never been built before, and doing it in a way where we had confidence that we could keep people safe. If we didn't have confidence that we could do that, we wouldn't move forward. We would not move forward. So that was the hardest part of this, and that required such detail, such understanding of how the virus works, how you could contain it, how you could contain spread, and that's what led to the extensive set of protocols that we created.

We're thrilled with our Tencent partnership. Tencent has been an amazing partner, and I know that they're looking forward to airing select games for the hundreds of millions of fans in China, and I know just even from the scrimmage games that have been aired, the numbers in terms of viewership have been very, very positive, and I know that, like I said, our hundreds of millions of Chinese fans are looking forward to having the NBA restart again tomorrow.

Q. Which of the new measures, strategies or innovations that have been implemented in the new way games are organized will be here to stay?

MARK TATUM: If I understand your question, I think the innovations that I'm most excited about in the arena are things around the different camera angles. Like I said, we're going to have 30 robotic cameras that are not going

to be manned by a person. These will be cameras that are set up to give the fans unique camera angles, and cameras will be, for example, in places where fans would normally be. And as I mentioned, there's going to be a rail cam that will actually run up and down the court and capture the footage as the players move up and down the court.

There will be different audio enhancements because with no fans in the arena, you can pick up different kinds of audio more clearly, and those will be mixed into the broadcast.

And then I'm really excited about this integration of the virtual fans in the arena, where we're going to give fans around the world the opportunity to participate. Even though they can't physically be in the arena, they can virtually be there and be seen by the players, by the teams who are in the arena.

So I think those are some of the innovations that we are really, really excited about seeing in Orlando.

Q. My question is actually a two-part question. First one is during the long time of the lockdown, did you ever doubt that you guys could put this together and restart the season? And the second one is Michele Roberts last night spoke about the chance of a bubble for next season. Is that something you're really considering?

MARK TATUM: Great question. So they're really both related, right. I think when you're trying to do business in a pandemic, it's all about the safety and health, first and foremost. Has to be about safety and health. So when we suspended the season on March 11th -- and by the way, one of the reasons I think we were so ready at the time and pretty decisive on March 11th is because we had spent two months before that trying to understand the virus. As you all know, we have a very significant presence and business in China, and when the virus hit China first, we have several offices in China, and our offices were affected by that. And so we actually started then to understand the virus, understand its impact, and so by the time March 11th came we were somewhat prepared -- as prepared as we could be. So at that point we knew that there was still a lot that we needed to learn about the virus.

We knew a lot. We knew as much as we could, but we knew there was still a lot to learn about the virus.

At that point we weren't sure. We had to figure out and consult with the experts to say, is there a way where we could restart our season safely, and that's what I mentioned earlier where that was the hard part, right, of mapping that out and doing something that's never been

done before.

Now, with respect to Michele Roberts' comments, you know, because she's been in every conversation with us over the last couple of months about the restart for this season, so she knows how hard it is to keep people safe and to keep people healthy, and what she has seen -- and she's actually in the bubble now. She's been in the campus. She sees how effective it is, and she sees how if everybody abides by the protocols that were set up how safe it can be.

So there is a sense of comfort there that it's all about safety and health, and as we restart the season, that was a priority, and as we think about next season, that will be the priority. We'll get more information about the virus. Maybe there will be different ways of dealing with it. But we're looking at, I'd say, any restart for next season -- by the way, we're taking the learnings from this restart, and we're going to apply that to next season.

We haven't started really engaging around next season yet. It really has been all of our energy, all of our focus has been making sure that this restart could be successful. But we are now starting to in the very early stages with the Players' Association and with our teams, starting to think about, okay, how do we do next season, but again, the safety and health is the number one priority.

Q. You said you just started the process of elaborating like some sort of a schedule and all of that, but when will be the maximum due date on this? And your personal take on the champion this season with the restart; will the champion be a legitimate champion or seen by some players who say it won't be the same kind of a championship?

MARK TATUM: Two good questions. On the first one, what we have said is our last possible date of the Finals would be October 13th if there's a Game 7. That's the last possible date. We have talked about a target restart of December for the next season. That hasn't been agreed to yet. There still have to be discussions with the Players' Association on that, and as I mentioned, we're starting to have those conversations now. But that would be what the target date is, but that hasn't been decided.

For those people who suggest that whoever wins the championship this year should have some sort of an asterisk, if you will, I would tell you that whoever wins the championship this year will be very, very, very deserving of being called NBA champions because the amount of adversity, the amount of mental fortitude to go through 70 percent of the season and then have to take off -- for many of these players, this is the most amount of time that

they've ever not played organized basketball. Then to come back into camp, to play in this environment that no one has ever done before, and then to go out, play with no fans, live fans, in the arena, the champion will be a true champion because they will have had to overcome so much adversity to get to that finish line. And I think it will be rewarding and I think it will be satisfying for whomever wins the championship. And I think they will get all the credit that they deserve as being an NBA champion this year.

Q. Staying on a different note, staying in the bubble for several weeks poses a lot of challenges to the players, including the lack or absence of sex. What are the league's plans to address this? Are the players allowed to have conjugal visits?

MARK TATUM: Wow. There are -- we know that staying in the campus requires tremendous sacrifices, and so we understand that, and I would say that the players -- not just the players but the coaches, the trainers, the staff that are there are making enormous sacrifices, and we understand that.

During the season games and through the first rounds of the Playoffs, again, the campus, there's no movement in and out of the campus, so the people that are in the campus are the people that are on the campus. We are talking about having family members being able to join after the first round of the Playoffs, and so at that point family members will be able to join the campus. But again, we understand that everyone is making tremendous sacrifices here to be within that campus environment, all in the name of safety and health.

Q. I have two questions: How the league reacted to the news that Nikola Jokić was infected with the virus in Serbia and how do you comment on Bogdanovic's decision to wear a message to Serbia on his jersey? Thank you.

MARK TATUM: Yeah, so he tested positive overseas, and thankfully he is healthy and he is safe and he is now in the campus, and he's doing well. And I think that -- it brought home, I think, the seriousness of this virus for everyone, that no one is immune from it, and that playing in this campus under these protocols is the safest place you can be quite frankly, the safest place you can be.

With regards to the messages on the jerseys, we've had an incredible take up. I'm not sure if everybody knows, but we have 18 international players who will have social justice messages translated into their native languages on their jerseys, and nine of them will wear "equality" in their native language. It is everything from French, Slovenian,

German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Italian, Bosnian, so all these different languages, and it's players expressing themselves and I think showing unity with their teammates, and I think that's been a very positive outpouring of support for their teammates and for the social justice issues that are going on in the United States and around the world today. All very positive.

Q. One quick question: Do you believe that the bubble that you created in Orlando can be set as an example for other competitions? I'm thinking about the Olympics. Have you been in contact with the IOC?

MARK TATUM: So it's a very good question. I have not been directly in contact with the IOC, but as you may or may not know, I am on the executive committee of FIBA, and obviously FIBA has been in direct contact with the IOC. Andreas Zagklis and I speak every week, and we actually have our chief medical officer on FIBA's medical commission, and so there's a lot of sharing of information about our NBA campus and the bubble environment that I know is being shared with the IOC, as well.

One of the, I think, benefits of this entire pandemic over the last couple of months has been the coming together of the sport's community. There's been a tremendous amount of sharing amongst leagues. I remember with the Bundesliga when they created their protocols, I was on the phone with them on a regular basis, and we shared information and shared protocols together. We were, again, talking to the CBA. We were talking to the Premier League, the English Premier League. We all spoke about how we could do this together and what's the best way to do it.

In this particular scenario, we were not competing with each other, but we were competing together to fight the coronavirus, and I think if there's learnings here that we can share with others so that we can create safe and healthy environments for athletes and for sport, we're all for it. We're all for it, because I think that the world is a better place when there are sports, when there's competition, and we have a collective responsibility to be able to do it in a safe and healthy way. So that's my hope.