

NBA Media Conference

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Commissioner Adam Silver

Media Conference



ADAM SILVER: Welcome, everyone. Appreciate you tuning in to this virtual press conference here in Atlanta.

First of all, let me address why we're here. Throughout this pandemic, we've sought to find the right balance between the health and safety of our players, the community that's involved in producing NBA basketball, and of course our fans, along with the economic interests as well of our community. Add into that social justice issues. So all of that has been on our mind since almost a year ago when we shut down the NBA.

Of course, last season we ended up finishing down in Orlando, Florida, on a campus, a bubble. This season we concluded that because of the length of the season, we really couldn't operate in that format over such a long period of time. So, of course, we're playing in home arenas.

As to the All-Star Game itself, this is not the experience we're all used to when it comes to All-Star, which began as All-Star Sunday, then a weekend, then almost an entire week of festivities as we've moved around the country. We have a very condensed version of All-Star this year, which will be tomorrow night beginning at 6:30 Eastern. We'll begin with two skill events, then move into the game, have a Slam Dunk contest at halftime.

Again, we feel we've struck the appropriate balance here, looking out for the interests of everyone involved. We're very appreciative of the Atlanta Hawks. Tony Ressler, the principal governor. Steve Koonin, the president. Then of course the folks here at State Farm Arena for their willingness to host us over the last few days.

On the social justice point, we made a decision, and it was part of the reason why we're here in Atlanta, that this was an opportunity to focus on the HBCUs, the Historically Black Colleges and Universities. There are 101 HBCUs in the United States. About 25 of those colleges and universities will be represented in the arena tomorrow night. There are approximately a quarter of a million students attending those HBCUs right now. The vast majority of those schools are based here in the South. There are six HBCUs in Atlanta. They include Clark Atlanta

University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Morris Brown College and others. They will be well represented here tomorrow night.

I should point out Earl Lloyd, the very first Black player to play on the court in an NBA game, was a graduate of an HBCU – West Virginia State University. We're going to have Robert Covington here from the Portland Trail Blazers participating in the Skills Challenge. He's a graduate of Tennessee State University. In addition, Chris Paul, who began his collegiate career at Wake Forest, is finishing up his degree at Winston-Salem State University. So HBCUs are represented by our current players on the floor.

In addition, tomorrow night our three referees who will be working the game are all graduates of HBCUs. We have approximately 120 HBCU alums who either work at one of our teams or at the league office.

In addition, we will be contributing over \$3 million to the HBCUs for various rewards in skills challenges tomorrow night that the players will earn on the floor. That will total at least \$3 million. Maybe even more important than the money, we'll be focusing an enormous amount of attention on these schools. Turner Broadcasting, throughout the pregame show and the game itself, will be highlighting HBCU graduates and the schools themselves. And, of course, the All-Star Game and festivities are distributed in roughly 215 countries and territories. The exposure, I think, will be incredibly valuable.

Speaking of HBCUs, we lost a dear friend of ours earlier this year who was a graduate of Jackson State University, Sekou Smith, someone who appeared on air for NBA TV and also wrote for NBA.com. I know he's a dear friend to many of the media who cover us. He was a close friend of mine. A very sad loss.

Also on the HBCU front, Atlanta native Vernon Jordan, who was a good friend to the NBA, passed this week. He was a graduate of Howard University Law School.

I also want to make note of the loss of a close friend, Mike Pearl. He was the executive producer of Turner Sports from 1994 to 2003. He really put his imprint on Inside the NBA. He was a legendary sports broadcaster, a member of the Broadcasting Hall of Fame. Again, someone who was



very close to the NBA family, and stayed close to us with some work he did at ABC and ESPN after he left Turner. To those three gentlemen's families, our deepest condolences.

With that, I'm happy to answer any questions that you have.

Q. My question is about next season. It's kind of in two parts: Is the plan still to make next season as "normal" as can be with an October start and a June finish? Is there any appetite yet for the league to talk about resuming the China games or going to Japan or the Europe game next season? How much of an impediment do you think international travel will be for the league next year?

ADAM SILVER: First of all, no plans yet to travel for next season. In all likelihood, we won't travel internationally until the following season at the earliest. But the plan remains to try to resume our season as close to so-called normal as possible next year. It was one of the reasons why, in setting the schedule this year, we decided to stop in mid-July. We both wanted to allow those players who wanted to participate in the Olympics to do so, but in addition we realized if we were going to get back on cycle, and the players were going to get the appropriate downtime before the season began, we didn't want to go deep into the summer or fall, as we did last season.

Frankly, I'm fairly optimistic at this point that we will be able to start on time, and that we have roughly half of our teams have fans in their arenas right now. If vaccines continue on the pace they are, and they continue to be as effective as they have been against the virus and its variants, we're hopeful that we'll have relatively full arenas next season as well.

Q. What do you think it's going to take for the diversity and inclusion to improve in the coaching, front office and ownership ranks?

ADAM SILVER: It's going to take certainly more than we're doing now. We've made progress over the years. We're constantly looking at how we can do better. The Coaches Association is working closely with us on this.

First of all, I don't think there are any quick fixes. I think we want to appropriately respect everyone who's involved. There's no coach that I know who wants to get hired based on his skin color, but they want a fair opportunity. Part of that is ensuring that we're developing coaches appropriately in the pipeline, that they're getting the right opportunities to interview, the right opportunities to network as other coaches have historically done. As I said, I don't

think there's any doubt there's more work to be done.

I'll only add that I think the league deserves to be looked at as a whole. Of course, the head coaching position is critically important as representatives of the organization. But I think if you look across the league and its teams in terms of the progress we've made in terms of diversity, I would hold us up to virtually any other company.

Again, it doesn't mean there isn't more work to be done and we don't need some fresh approaches, but I also think we've made a fair amount of progress over the years.

Q. Given the schedule for the second part of the season and how tight it will be in the playoffs, is the bubble, going back to the bubble, something you guys are considering?

ADAM SILVER: We're not considering going back to a bubble right now. I don't rule anything out just because one thing we've all come to understand over the last year is that the virus is firmly in charge. We need to adjust to circumstances as they present themselves.

But as I said in response to the prior question, I'd say maybe for the first time in the past year I'm fairly optimistic right now that as we see fans returning to our arenas, as we see public health officials across the country begin to open up sporting events, theaters, restaurants, other forms of entertainment, I feel pretty good that we're going to continue apace.

By the time we reach the playoffs in mid-May, things will even be considerably better than they are now. Also, obviously here in the United States, we've been making excellent progress in terms of vaccinations. That will be very helpful in getting people back in the arenas.

Q. What do you think the biggest impediment is for this almost glass ceiling that Black coaches have across the league? You mentioned the numbers across the board going higher. That makes it seem almost worse that they're not able to break through, especially considering the number used to be higher in the middle part of the last decade.

ADAM SILVER: First of all, there shouldn't be an impediment, as we all know. I would say as a practical matter, what we're seeing happen, and I think this is in part human nature, people tend to turn to the people who they know best and they're most familiar with.

I think in certain cases you have a network of relationships that go back many years. To the extent that people aren't part of those networks, they're clearly as a disadvantage in

the process.

One of the things the league can do in working with our teams, therefore, is focus on a better process that ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to sort of join the fraternity, so to speak. You're not going to get to be a head coach in this league unless you serve most likely as an assistant coach first or you've been a top player in the league.

I realize a lot of these things don't happen automatically, that it requires real focus and intentionality. That's one thing the league has learned over the years, that you have to be vigilant, you have to constantly be talking about these things, you have to keep looking at the data.

I think grand statements aren't all that helpful, whether from me or others. It comes down to very specific tactics. Using the opportunity whenever we talk to our teams to go back to the data and say, Here is where we are, here is the number of assistant coaches, this is how the processes have worked.

That is, I think, what is necessary. Like with most things in life, there are no real magic bullets here. As I said earlier, I just want to make sure we're respecting everyone as part of the process, too.

Lastly, I'll say I don't want to create a process in which people are checking the boxes, and that someone becomes the Black candidate who got interviewed but didn't get the job. Everyone knows that person wasn't really going to get the job, but somebody went through a process to appease the league office or somebody else.

It requires real engagement. That's just how I'll conclude.

Q. How would you describe the financial status of your league, considering that 40% of the revenue is still kind of missing?

ADAM SILVER: The long-term health of the league is very solid. Between last year and this year, we're looking at considerable losses. I generally don't talk about that publicly because teams are largely privately held. We're not suggesting that is anybody else's issue but ours.

Last season and this season has required a significant investment on the part of the team owners. They accept that. Players will end up taking a reduction in salary this season because they are partners with the league and teams on revenue. The executives, team executives, have all taken haircuts on their salary.

I think when we all step back, we feel very fortunate to be

working under these circumstances. My sense is the players feel the same way.

Q. How could you describe your relationship with FIBA about the upcoming Olympic Games? And how satisfied you are about the first half of the season?

ADAM SILVER: First of all, in terms of the first half of the season, it went essentially as we had expected. We ended up playing 95% of our games. We knew we were going to get positive cases for players and staff members operating out of the bubble. I felt our protocols held up as well as we could have hoped. It seems that we are able, through our testing protocols, to catch infections very early. The goal was to catch infections before people become infectious and prevent spread. We feel we've done that fairly effectively.

I feel good about the first half of the season. Again, I credit the schedule makers who had the foresight to divide the season in two parts. We were able to have the flexibility to push games into the second half of the season. Obviously, we won't have that same flexibility in the second half. Something we're watching for closely.

In terms of FIBA, we have an excellent relationship with them. We're partners in growing the game on a global basis. We anticipate the Olympics going forward as scheduled in Japan. Again, that's of course an election for our players to make should they want to participate. Sometimes people think in terms of the NBA, of course, about the U.S. team, but our players compete for dozens of teams internationally.

Again, based on the progress we've made, I expect they'll have an excellent competition this summer in Tokyo.

Q. I wanted to ask about the officiating. It's been under scrutiny here lately, guys upset with the technicals, things of that nature. Do you just chalk this up as part of a season? Just part of a stressful season? Or is it a cause for concern?

ADAM SILVER: First of all, in terms of the data, which we obviously look very closely at, there's nothing aberrational happening, whether in terms of accuracy of calls or number of technicals on the floor.

But I will say everyone is under enormous pressure this year. The officials aren't exempt from that. They are also operating under our sort of work quarantine protocols. One of the things we've learned over the last year is that the mental stress is incredibly tough on everyone involved. I think in some cases you have some younger officials, too, who maybe are still trying to calibrate their relationships



with players.

So I'm not particularly concerned necessarily with the calls on the floor. I'm always concerned about the members of our larger community and how they're interacting with each other.

I think it's also the case, it's not a secret, maybe where a little bit of the shorter fuses come in, is that when you have arenas that are packed with 19,000 people and you can hardly hear the person next to you, a player may be used to saying something directed at an official that the official wouldn't typically hear. Then the issue becomes, in largely empty arenas, when they do hear what the player says, how is it they should react.

I think it's something we're talking about in the league office. I think sometimes when I hear the commentators after the fact talking about a technical that's called on the floor, what they're saying is very different than what I see in the report that is on my desk. I'm not anxious to necessarily repeat those words, but everybody has to find the right balance in a pandemic and be mindful of the stress.

I will end by saying, I could have added this in response to the last question, that the basketball has been off the charts. That's what's so interesting. I think we saw it first in the bubble. That was attributed to the fact that the players maybe were getting more sleep, rest, weren't traveling through multiple time zones. To me, that has continued this season. Despite everything that is gone on, despite a little chippiness maybe around the officiating, I think overall the quality of the games have been great. I'm pleased about that.

Q. It's been about a year since the start of the pandemic, from the shutdown to the bubble, now All-Star. Essentially as a commissioner you've led the blueprint on having to navigate through COVID-19, not just for the NBA but for other leagues who followed suit. Was there any pressure from investors or even the legacy as a commissioner, to proceed with the All-Star Game, knowing it was highly unfavored by most of the players?

ADAM SILVER: There was not pressure certainly from the teams. In fact, teams end up being largely on the side of players. It's a bit lonely as the commissioner. To the extent their players are saying we'd rather not play, often the teams reflect those same sentiments.

It's my job to look out for the overall interest of the league. As I said earlier, I haven't made it a secret out of the fact that economic interests are a factor.

I'll add, though, to me when I say "economic interests are a factor," it's less to do with the economics of one Sunday night on TNT in the United States. It has more to do with the larger brand value of the NBA. The fact this is our number one fan engagement event of the year. Because we went forward with All-Star, not only did roughly 100 million people vote for the All-Stars on a global basis, but based on past ratings, well over 100 million people will watch the game and the ancillary competitions. We'll have over a billion social media views and engagements.

It's sort of what we do. For me, it would have been a bigger deal not to have it. I mean, especially since we know how to operate a bubble, and we have we'll call it our mini bubble here in Atlanta, from the moment the players land to when they leave, they're only going to be operating between the hotel and the arena. Once we got to the point where we felt we could do it safely, we felt we definitely should go forward. We should do it for our fans and for our business.

I know that some players have made public comments, of course, suggesting they'd rather not be at All-Star. I'm almost 30 years in the league. The guys, many have told me directly they're thrilled to be All-Stars. They recognize their careers are relatively short. For some of them, there's several first-time All-Stars here, there's many who only had been an All-Star a couple times. I think even for them to be able to gather here, even over a short period of time, is truly meaningful.

So maybe it should be judged when people are looking back as to what this meant to them as opposed to what some of the initial reactions were from the players.

Q. What is your response to LeBron's comments feeling that proceeding with the All-Star Game was essentially a slap in the face?

ADAM SILVER: As I said earlier, it would be incredibly hypocritical of me to say to LeBron that you should speak out on issues that are important to you, but not ones when you're critical of the league.

We're all part of a community. I respect him and his point of view. Also, at the same time, I appreciate his professionalism. If you had a chance to see him, as captain and general manager of his team, proceed with the draft, he did it in good humor. He took it very seriously. My sense is he's going to be here, as he always is, as a top-notch professional and engaged in the game.

I think, again, I respect his point of view. But it seems like issues that can be worked out in the family, so to speak.

Q. I have a couple questions related to the vaccine. I'm unaware, I don't know if you know, if any players or coaches or assistant coaches have had it yet. More generally speaking, I'm curious how the league's effort to educate and convince a large majority of the players to take it, how that's going. Finally, as the vaccine is rolled out and more people get it, do your players have to be vaccinated for you to refill arenas, and end the Zoom stuff that we have to do? That's not as important as the fans and all that, but do the players have to be vaccinated for all that stuff to happen, too?

ADAM SILVER: Thanks for those questions.

First of all, there is no player that I am aware of that has been vaccinated yet. Number two, there are some coaches who have been vaccinated, as well as some team personnel. The coaches who have been vaccinated is because they were age-appropriate under the protocols in the jurisdictions where they live. There are other team personnel, again, it's state by state, but because they're either health-care providers, we have doctors working with the team, et cetera. So there have been some members of the community that have been vaccinated.

In terms of the education efforts, those are ongoing. I think ultimately these are personal decisions that players need to make, just like everyone in our communities need to make. We see our role, together with the Players Association, providing them with the best possible information, and also encouraging them to seek out information on their own. They have personal physicians, others they may rely on.

Dr. Leroy Sims, who works with the NBA, has been conducting a series of Zoom calls with the teams. I know the teams have been also providing their own resources to players, along with the Players Association, to help them make those decisions.

I don't think that every player certainly needs to be vaccinated for fans to come back. I mean, that's not anything that the health authorities have suggested to us. I think we're now fairly familiar with those kinds of engagements that can lead to people getting the virus from someone else. There may be a herd immunity aspect to this, which means whether in our community or in jurisdictions, a certain percentage of people who have been vaccinated or have antibodies will cover others.

I also think being realistic, around the NBA, as I said, we have no plans to mandate that players get vaccinated. For any sort of large-scale, required vaccinations to take place, that can only happen with the Players Association. As I said, we've only talked about educational efforts.

So I don't see every player needing to get vaccinated as an impediment to fans returning to the arena. No more do I think the fact that every fan won't be vaccinated is an impediment of fans coming back to the arena. I think it's with a combination of vaccines, antibodies, herd immunity in communities, proper safety and cleanliness protocols, we'll be able to return to something that looks a lot closer to normal beginning next season, at least based on the information I have available to me today.

Q. What is the current state of the league's relationship in China? We've had reports that CCTV is set to resume coverage tomorrow. More broadly, after everything that's happened, where do you stand in China?

ADAM SILVER: CCTV resumed their coverage during the Finals, as you'll recall, at the end of last season. Games 5 and 6 were back on CCTV. We have our existing relationship with Tencent, which I know as you know, is a streaming service in China, which has been carrying our games throughout the season. Our business has continued there.

For me, no different than the reason we conduct All-Star here in the United States for fan engagement. We have hundreds of millions of fans in China. We see it as our business to serve those fans. Our general philosophy and our mission is if we can improve people's lives through basketball, we think it's appropriate for us to be continuing to export our games to China.

Our values remain the same. Our business continues. It's largely the business of exporting American basketball and the culture that comes with it to China. It's enjoyed, as I said, by tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of people in China who continue to watch it. That's our current status.

Q. Is it realistic to not have any kind of widespread vaccine in place ahead of the playoffs, given the potential for teams having to be shut down during them as a result of that? With that, how will you guys handle that during the playoffs, when it seems like you have a pretty regimented time to get those playoffs finished on the schedule that you want?

ADAM SILVER: Well, I think it is realistic, even if we didn't have required vaccinations, because of course no one, none of the players have been vaccinated now, and we've only had to postpone a relatively small percentage of our games.

We know that for the most part a testing protocol, together

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

with mask wearing and all of other precautions we're taking, largely works. The NCAA Tournament is going to be played this year, again without vaccinations for their players.

To me, we'll make additional progress if players get vaccinated, but it certainly doesn't require that they all get vaccinated. I also anticipate, we're seeing this now both I think in actual numbers of people getting vaccinated in the United States, and opinion polls, that people are becoming more willing to get vaccinated. To those who have been hesitators, I think as tens of millions of people now in the United States have gotten the vaccine, that people are seeing at least in the short term what the impact is, and they're hearing about how incredibly effective these vaccines are. My hunch is that most players ultimately will choose to get vaccinated.

It's a personal decision, but I think especially when really, it's built into your question, when they see the alternative. One thing I should note, in addition to the personal health benefits, the family health benefits, the economic benefits to getting vaccinated, because of the protocols we have in place, they're incredibly burdensome on our players and on our teams.

For example, the CDC has already announced when you get vaccinated, you don't need to quarantine as a close contact. As you know, many of our players have had to sit out not because they tested positive but because they were required to quarantine because of a close contact.

In addition, right now as we operate under this so-called work quarantine protocol, where players are largely only going between their homes and the arenas, once they get vaccinated they'll be able to do more in their communities. That's something we've already begun talking to the Players Association about. So there will be some real advantages and benefits to getting vaccinated for the players.

Again, they have to make personal decisions at the end of the day. I take that very seriously. I take concerns very seriously. But my sense is most will ultimately decide that it's in their interest to get vaccinated.

Q. What are your plans for Summer League? Is it feasible to have a Summer League in Las Vegas this year? If that's not possible, is there any way to hold some kind of team mini-camp for rookies or younger undrafted or unsigned players looking to catch on in the league?

ADAM SILVER: We don't have concrete plans yet for the Summer League. It's something we began to think about.

Certainly, we would love to pick back up our Summer League in Las Vegas. We know that the teams very much value it as an opportunity to see, as you said, the undrafted players, and also to get some of the drafted players some time on the court.

This is going to be a very difficult draft for our teams – abbreviated college seasons, not the same opportunity to scout and visit with players that they have had historically.

I think we're going to end up as some combination of, built into your question, maybe an abbreviated Summer League, mini camps and other opportunities. I think everything is on the table now.

As we're seeing progress in our communities, I'm increasingly hopeful we'll be able to do and put together some of those events. I know for our teams, from a competitive standpoint, it's critically important they get an opportunity to see those players, particularly ones who aren't in the two-round draft. For the ones who do get drafted, get them an opportunity to put some court time in before the season starts.

Q. Kyrie Irving's social media post about the logo had sparked a conversation about whether or not it should be changed. At the league level, has there been any recent and meaningful discussion about that? On the Minnesota front, it is widely known Glen Taylor is looking to possibly sell the team, Kevin Garnett the other day expressing his frustration with the process. In situations like those, you tend to occasionally get involved. Are you monitoring that? Are you part of that situation? How do you see it?

ADAM SILVER: On your second question on Glen Taylor, I have been part of that. I will let Glen speak for himself. He did have discussions with some groups about potentially buying the franchise. I think Glen has waffled over the years. I think both he loves owning the Timberwolves and being part of the league, and at the same time I think he's sort of looking out to the future, just trying to be responsible to his family and the community in terms of next generation ownership.

I was dismayed to read that back and forth between Kevin Garnett and Glen Taylor. Obviously, Kevin sounded frustrated. Glen said he never heard directly from him. Yes, that is an opportunity for me to get directly involved, and I will.

In terms of your first question, there are no ongoing discussions right now at the league office about changing the logo. I certainly saw Kyrie Irving's comments. Again, everything changes over time. Nothing's permanently fixed.

But the logo is iconic. As you know, we're distributed globally. Even changing the logo, purely even from a legal standpoint, isn't an easy exercise. Not that that should be the impediment. The suggestion around Kobe Bryant, of course, gives me an opportunity to remind everyone last year we named the All-Star MVP trophy after Kobe Bryant, no doubt one of the greatest ever in this league, someone we all knew so well. So, sure, he would be on the list, no doubt, if we were thinking about changing it.

It doesn't feel to me that this is the appropriate moment to be changing the logo. While it's never been officially declared that the logo is Jerry West, it sure looks a lot like him. He still is thriving in our community. I know he's so self-effacing and has said, please change it if that's what people want to do. It just doesn't feel like the right moment to be thinking about that.

That doesn't mean, again, that we won't turn back and look at it at some point. To me, I appreciate the sentiments, but it feels like the logo is appropriate right now.

Q. Has there been any decision with the Players Association about changing the one-and-done rule, allowing high school players to enter the draft? There's been talk of a person developing a high school league where he would pay high school players. What are your thoughts on players getting paid under the age of 17, 18? What is the NBA's kind of approach on this?

ADAM SILVER: On the one-and-done, there have been discussions with the Players Association. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in essence, brought Michele [Roberts] and I together on that issue because she chaired a commission on behalf of the NCAA to look at the issue. As it is well-known now, she made a recommendation that we return to 18 as our minimum age.

As a result, Michele and I did discuss it. We discussed it directly with Secretary Rice. We both agreed that as part of the process of looking at a new Collective Bargaining Agreement, we should discuss that issue.

It's one where I think we're both on both sides of the issue sometimes in terms of what it will mean for the league having younger players in the league. It sort of brings to the forefront really your second question in terms of the development cycle of players.

Twenty-five percent of the players in this league come from outside of the United States. In most of their jurisdictions, they become professionals not at 18 but often at 14. It's a whole different development cycle. It's something that, of course, we pay a lot of attention to.

I don't have any fundamental opposition to paying younger people who have a unique skill where other people are benefiting from their services. So my reaction to the new league is that optionality is good.

I think for the NBA, we of course in our G League do allow players to come directly from high school. Minimum age 19 in the NBA, and it's 18 in the G League. We created Team Ignite in the G League as an opportunity for players who choose not to go to college and want to become professionals. They can go directly into the G League and be well compensated. Under the theory, too, in addition to being compensated for their services, they can focus full time on the potential opportunity to play in the NBA.

We recognize that is not for everyone. There may be the player who is not at that skill level yet where he's been identified as sort of a clear prospect. There are other young people who grow a lot at that age or whatever else, or want to go to college.

To me, options are a good thing. I think for the younger high school player, if they can see an opportunity to play basketball and make money and get educated at the same time – I think for us right now, the NBA, we don't want to be in the business of paying minors. It doesn't feel right for us right now, in part because it's complicated in making sure that those young people, since they aren't of the age of consent, are getting the proper guidance and the support to make those kind of decisions, because it may mean giving up college eligibility, for example, at a young age to play professionally.

I think it's generally good for the community to have optionality, especially when very solid people, which appears to be the case in this league that's just been announced, are backing it and behind it. That's one thing we will pay a lot of attention to because those young players are potentially the future of our league. We want to make sure that both on the court and off the court they're getting the right mentoring and guidance.

But overall, I think it's good for the game. It's more focus on the game. Especially all that's happening now in digital media, social media, new streaming services, there's definitely interest in this content. So we're paying attention to that.