

NBA All Star 2022

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Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Commissioner Adam Silver

Commissioner's Press Conference



ADAM SILVER: Thank you, Tim. I'm thrilled to see you all back here in person. Many of you were with us in Chicago almost exactly two years ago, which was the last big event around the league and in many ways bookended or we hope it ends up bookending these two events. Sort of the beginning of what was the worst of the pandemic and hopefully this is the beginning or the middle of the end of the worst of the pandemic.

So many of you have lived through this past two years with us. It's been a difficult time for so many, but I'm, frankly, thrilled to be back here in person with so many people. I would say it's been a celebratory mood for people in the NBA family. Many people haven't seen each other in large settings like this in almost two years, so it's been somewhat of a family event. People getting a chance to really hug each other, be around people. People are feeling a bit at ease as the restrictions have come down. I think that's a victory unto itself that we're all back here together.

Of course, also, we're here to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the NBA, and I'm also really excited that so many of those great legends are able to be here with us in Cleveland. I think roughly 50 of the I think approximately 60 of those living legends we anticipate will be in town tomorrow for the celebration. I would say for me I was here as part of the league for our 50th Anniversary, and there's just this incredible symmetry of being back here in Cleveland again for this great event.

I can remember being here in Cleveland in 1997. I was then part of NBA Entertainment. I remember being out on the court and watching, along with many of you in this room, those great legends lined up and with the special feeling in the air of just that collection of the greatest players, and I anticipate it will feel the same way tomorrow.

It's also a reminder for me that even at 75 years we're still somewhat of a young league. I think of the fact that I always say our equivalent of Babe Ruth is Bill Russell to me, is someone that I can still speak to on the phone and be around and is in position to pass down sort of NBA lore to many generations of players.

Also, it's a reminder to me that there's so much ahead of us. When I think about where this league now stands 75 years into its existence as we become more global, as we become more digital, it only creates more opportunities for us to bring basketball literally to every spot on the planet. We see continued growth in the sport. I think as every new platform comes along and now as people are talking about Web3 or the Metaverse, it's that much more opportunity to connect with people around the globe with basketball.

More immediately here in Cleveland, I want to thank former Mayor Jackson and now Mayor Bibb for their incredible hospitality making this event happen here in Cleveland. Of course, Dan and Jennifer Gilbert, the principal owners of the team, team president Len Komoroski for partnering with us here for an incredible event here.

Lastly, just to the people of Cleveland, Northeast Ohio, I know like so many American cities, you were hit particularly hard by this pandemic, and so it's great to be here not only to celebrate with you, but, as I said at the top, as a reopening of your city, in addition to the thousands of people who have come to town to celebrate. We're projecting that we'll have a roughly \$100 million economic impact on the community around the All-Star festivities, so I think it's a needed boost to the local economy as well.

So thank you all, again, for being here. It's great to see many of you again in person, and with that, Tim, happy to answer any questions.

Q. As the league moves forward, what are you looking for? What do you want to see in a post-pandemic NBA world? Maybe more specific to your location in New York City, do you anticipate the vaccine ordinance as it relates to the two New York teams disappearing and that Kyrie Irving would be eligible to play before the end of the season?

ADAM SILVER: In terms of a post-pandemic NBA, we're looking for something very much closer to the normal that we are familiar with, and we are beginning to see that already. As most of you know, with the exception of a portion of the season in Toronto, we've seen full buildings. The regulations vary from city to city, state to state, but the



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teams have all managed to work through those issues, and fans have been eager to come back. I have done a fair amount of traveling over the course of this season, and as I said, I think people, a combination of missing that in-person experience, and also, not being able to enjoy the company of others, I think that's always been part of an NBA arena experience, that ability to come together.

I think, as I have said before, we all have to learn to live with this virus. Based on what I have read and been told by our experts, it's not likely to go anywhere. There will probably be other variants, at some point, but we now have tools to deal with those. Obviously, vaccines, boosters, anti-virals, et cetera, that didn't exist when the pandemic started. So I feel that as a country, as a world we're much better equipped to deal with it now.

In terms of New York City, I'm not sure exactly what will happen specifically there. But as I watch what's happening around the country, many of these restrictions are being lifted, and in places that had vaccine requirements and in some cases masking requirements, those are also being lifted. I haven't talked directly to Mayor Adams about this, but judging based on what other communities are doing, my assumption is they will look at local rates of infection and testing. As those continue to come down, if they continue to come down as they have, my sense will be certain restrictions that are in place will be lifted. But, again, I leave that to New York City.

Q. There's been a lot of noise over these last few weeks about teams being upset or would be upset if James Harden wound up with the Sixers. Obviously, he did, even faster than many people thought. What is the feedback you've received from teams in the wake of the trade, and what would have to happen in terms of a formal complaint from the Nets or another team to actually lead the League to open an investigation of the Sixers?

ADAM SILVER: There is no ongoing investigation right now. I think around the league this so-called notion of player empowerment is not a new issue, as you know, Marc, from having covered the league for a long time. As I have said before, we, of course, want players and teams to honor contracts.

So I think in this case you had two teams that ultimately seem satisfied by the outcome of the trade and willingly entered into it. I don't think there will be a time in the future, at least while I'm involved in the league, where society is going to change so much that players aren't going to express their views on where they want to play or don't want to play. But I think there's a sense around the league that there are improvements we can make to our

system. It's something we're constantly looking at just to find that right balance of players having a say where they play, but also ensuring that every team is in a position in this league to compete and that contracts are honored.

I mean, no team has logged a formal complaint with the league. These are things that we watch play out, unfortunately, in many cases in the media. As I said, I believe in the time I've been in the league over successive collective bargaining agreements and player systems, we've seen incremental improvements over the years. I don't have something specific in mind that can prevent a situation like this, but I think we and the players have a collective common interest in ensuring that contracts are honored. Partly because it's not just for the teams, but players sign with certain teams with an expectation, too, that contracts of other players will be honored because, of course, we're a team sport.

We'll continue to look at it, but nothing immediate right now.

Q. Just kind of following up on that, Harden and Simmons both kind of forced trades, and of course, Harden had done it 13 months before. We've seen many instances of this the last few years than probably ever. To the extent that this may be a concern, I'm curious how much you've heard from owners on this issue? You do have a potential CBA negotiation coming up on the horizon. Is this something that is a growing discussion? Are there possible solutions? Do you expect it to be part of that discussion?

ADAM SILVER: First of all, Howard, I'm not sure you're correct in saying we've seen more of this than ever before. Just as an empirical matter. It's a problem, but some of our all-time greatest, many of whom will be here this weekend, as you know, demanded trades. There didn't used to exist social media. The league wasn't covered in the same way.

It wasn't talked about around the clock, but it's been a long-time issue in this league. That's not in any way to defend what we're seeing right now. I'm just saying this is not to me a new issue.

One of the ways through successive collective bargaining agreements we've addressed player issues is we have shorter contracts now, which I think is in the interest of both players and teams ultimately, which in some ways has encouraged more player movement of a certain kind. It's created more of a pay-for-performance system within a cap, so I think that's been positive.

Again, it's no secret that I've expressed my unhappiness with public trade demands. In the case of Ben Simmons I

don't think -- I can't think of a change to the system that to the extent you have a player that is willing to sit out and not be paid, which is the scenario we have right now. I don't want to speak for Ben, but that was the posture we saw that case of a player saying that, I'm unhappy in the city, and I'm not going to play, and you had a team saying we're not going to pay you, and there's going to be discipline. There's a stalemate. Ultimately, he got traded. I don't want to pretend standing here that I have some secret idea that I know can fix that problem.

I think you're dealing with situations where you have players with literally a unique skill on the planet, and that's always going to give them leverage, and you have teams with leverage. You know, where there's one NBA and one team they have an agreement with, and as I said, there may be tools that we can think of to create stronger incentives for players to comply with those agreements. But I don't think there's sort of some silver bullet here that we're going to go in in collective bargaining and say now we've fixed this problem. These are human beings.

I was reminded that, incidentally, watching James and Ben do their media, their first press conferences in their new cities. I think particularly coming through a pandemic. At the end of the day I think we forget sometimes when we're discussing these people that they are young men dealing with enormous amount of stress and difficult situations, but hearing them both, they're both extremely thoughtful. I think they were being very transparent and honest with the media about where they found themselves, and, again, I'm sympathetic to all sides here.

Of course, as the Commissioner of this league, we want our players to be happy. We want them to find themselves in situations where they think they can be most productive. At the same time we want to run an orderly league, and so like a lot of things in life, we have to find the appropriate balance there. It's not as if, here it is, there will be more discipline, there will be more of this. I think it's going to be an issue we'll have to work through, but I think, again, there's a common interest we should have with the Players Association in doing what we can to fix this because it's a team sport, so you have a bunch of other players on that team who are possibly put in a disadvantaged situation based on what one player may be trying to do.

Q. Adam, just how do you feel about where the league is now in terms of parity and competition with the bigger and smaller markets?

ADAM SILVER: I think we're doing much better than we did historically. When you think about over the 75 years of this league, I think roughly over the first 65 years of this league, I think three teams won 60% of the championships,

and over the last 11 years, roughly, you've had eight different teams win championships, including most recently Milwaukee, a so-called small market.

Ideally, based on some of the issues I talked about earlier in terms of becoming more global, more digital, that it will become less important what the actual size of that market is. I mean, look at the team that they're building here in Cleveland. I think for those players, my sense is if only I were in a larger market, somehow that would change my fortunes. Because I think with a global footprint for this league, and Giannis Antetokounmpo is a perfect example, the notion that if he went to a market from my standpoint that had a million more people that somehow would put him in a different position commercially or from a basketball standpoint makes no sense.

Now, I recognize there's still differences in markets in this league. Sometimes it's not necessarily even a function of size. It's climate or taxation or quality of entertainment in the city. There are different variables, but I think there's been a leavening around the league. I don't hear that discussion as much where the league is divided in so-called large markets and small markets. In fact, if you do that division, we're then largely a league of small markets because there's only a few cities that are truly large in the U.S.

Again, I think it's positive in the direction we're going. There may be things and when we sit down with the players -- and, again, I think it's less about market size. It may be more about the way our CBA works in terms of a tax system. There may be better ways to help distribute the players to create more parity around the league. Those are things when we do sit down with the players I'm sure we'll talk about, but I'm pleased with the progress we've made.

Q. You know, if we are hopefully toward the end now and getting back to a normal life, people will start to reschedule weddings and vacations that were on hold. For the league what specifically -- things that weren't worth you doing the last two years will you now jump back into and say we'll get our bang for the buck now by doing this, and let's get on it?

ADAM SILVER: Well, Brian, one of the things that we look forward to begin doing again is international travel. We're very much a global league, and the opportunity to bring teams to other continents, to other places in the world is part of how we believe we grow the sport because we can have, I think, a dramatically larger impact by showing up in those cities creating a lot of excitement around those teams. That's one thing in particular.

Then here in the United States, more community-based on-the-ground activities. I think that this sport, one of the things that makes it so special is how accessible it is, particularly to the young people. We're very proud of our Jr. NBA and Jr. WNBA programs. Getting out there in the communities, hands-on involvement with kids. A lot of that, of course, had to be suspended, but, again, if things continue the way they are now, I'm looking forward to sort of being back on the ground in those programs this summer.

Q. Do you think international stuff could happen this coming preseason?

ADAM SILVER: Preseason of this year? Potentially. That's something we're looking at now.

Q. You already announced there will be games in Abu Dhabi in October. You mentioned Europe as a potential destination where you want to get back. I'm curious if you think the regular season might be a potential target '22-23.

ADAM SILVER: You're asking about this coming season? So, honestly, it probably won't happen for next season, certainly not regular-season games. I think there's a possibility we could look at some preseason games in Europe. There's so much unknown now in the way our schedule works. We have to plan those games significantly in advance.

So probably unlikely, but as I said in response to prior questions, certainly Europe is such an important market for us, and we would love to get back there with preseason games.

Q. I have two follow-ups from everything I have heard. One, you were talking about getting back to normal with the pandemic. What are your thoughts on press returning to locker rooms?

On the issue of players honoring the contracts, I guess, there's another side to this that we have players being paid to essentially not play. I'm thinking about John Wall this year, Al Horford last year. Is that a problem, and is there a fix?

ADAM SILVER: The answer to your second question first, of course, I think it's a problem when players are paid not to play. In some cases, that's by mutual agreement with the team. It may be a team that is in a rebuilding situation that is focused on its younger players. There's a sense that that veteran player isn't fitting in, for whatever reason, through the new culture they're trying to create, and it's a hard line there because if it truly is by mutual agreement,

I'm not sure the league office should be interfering.

On the other hand, this goes back to my pay-for-performance point earlier. You have an aggregate hard cap in essence. They're 50% of our system, the money is paid to the players. For every dollar that goes to a player that's not producing on the floor, that's \$1 less that's going to a player that is performing. That shouldn't be ideal for either players or teams.

Do I have a ready fix? No. I think, again, I'm hoping that those are the kinds of issues that when we sit down with the players, we can approach collectively.

In regard to reporters returning to locker rooms, I recognize what I am about to say may not be so popular with this group. It's not going to be so easy. I think that depending on where we see this virus, potential variants, you know, I think creating a little bit of distance may make more sense for the foreseeable future.

I also think it's a bit of an anachronism to have reporters in the actual room where players are dressing. I mean, it used to be, for those that have been around a while, in the old days it was about female reporters, and we all got past that issue. It was ridiculous. It was discriminatory and made no sense. At least from my standpoint, I never hear about those issues anymore. I think it's different now. I think there are different expectations of privacy, but at the same time I recognize we have to create an environment where you all can do your jobs. I think it's something, there is an association that you are all members of, that we should sit down and work together.

To me, there are two issues: There's just the health and safety issues for the players and for all of you as well. Then there's also -- I'm not sure if we were designing a system from scratch today, we would say come stand next to the players at their lockers as they're dressing, and that's the appropriate forum to interview them.

I think we should all address this together because we very much appreciate the coverage. We're dependent on it, and we want to accommodate you and facilitate it. So there may be better, different set of requirements where if players have an obligation to come to a podium to speak to all of you, there are different ways to arrange one-on-one interviews.

My sense is Mike Bass, our head of communications, is probably not pleased with that answer. But as I think about it and think you have to look at everything anew, particularly as we work through a pandemic, I think it's something we have to take a fresh look at.

Q. A few things. First on the business side, you said \$10 billion for the 75th Anniversary. Looking ahead, I know the NFL said \$25 billion by 2027 or something like that. Do you have a financial forecast in mind about what you want to see by the end of this decade? And on the diversity front, there's about 46 CEOs and team presidents and only three are Black. Do you guys, the Board of Governors, do you discuss that, and do you want to see more CEOs in positions for Black people?

ADAM SILVER: I don't have a particular financial projection to share today.

In terms of diversity, we discuss it all the time. We've made more progress in other areas. And in terms of CEOs on the business side of teams, we would absolutely love to see more progress there. One of the things that I have learned that not only do you have to talk about it all the time, but the actual numbers, you have to speak very specifically about it and share that data, talk about it collectively and set targets and move forward there. I think that, no doubt, that's an area we can do a better job.

Q. I will say keep in mind that us reporters like building relationships with these guys, and the less we're around them -- there's guys on the teams that have been there for three years I've never really met because of that. I understand the health and safety protocol aspect, but ultimately, the locker relationships also hurts reporting and can hurt the athlete in the end.

Anyway, that wasn't my question. A year ago, David Vanterpool got passed over despite being an associate head coach, African-American coach. Typically, the associate head coach gets the promotion. Didn't happen, but over the summer there was a lot of change. Seven of eight hires were African-American coaches who were actually very qualified for the jobs. I wanted to see if you could talk about that progress, but also, on the flip side, is there any concern from the front office standpoint where you have a lot of general managers in title who are actually not really general managers? You have presidents above them that really make them an assistant general manager, a lot of which have gotten those opportunities and been Black general managers, who aren't really in a decision-making situation because there are presidents above them. The general manager title gives them a raise and it looks good, but it actually is something else.

Is there concern that even though there are people of color who are getting these general manager roles, that they're not really general manager roles, and then are you happy about the direction of the coaches? I know there's a lot

there.

ADAM SILVER: Sure. Just on your first point in terms of reporters' ability to do their jobs, of course we understand building relationships is critical, and I think when you talk about the last two years or so, so much of that, of course, is pandemic-related. What I'm just really pointing out is we should look to see whether there's another way to build those relationships other than being actually in the locker room while players are dressing. As I said, I think if we were designing this from scratch today, it is an anachronism. I think we have a different sensibility, different sense of privacy than we used to, and I'm not sure that's the right way to do it. We should think about that.

In terms of, I can't really comment on a specific situation as to why an associate head coach or any assistant, for that matter, didn't get the job. I'm proud of the progress we've seen on the coaching front. Sixteen of our head coaches now are people of color. Fourteen are Black, as you know. Very positive progress there. I also don't want to discount what we've seen in terms of progress with general managers. Every situation is different. I don't think it's fair necessarily to think of many of those GMs as not having the GM job. There's been evolution in this league of different positions and what a president might do as compared to a GM.

But having said that, in response to the prior question, we spend a lot of time looking at those numbers. I don't want to set quotas around this league. Again, this is an area where in fairness to those great general managers out there and presidents of basketball, I don't want to take from teams their ability to make decisions, but I want to make sure that we're helping develop the right pool of candidates, that they're paying attention to diversity, that they are recognizing the benefits that come from it, from diversity and inclusion in terms of how those teams are managed, how players potentially respond.

So, it's something we spend a lot of time on. We talk a lot about. Part of it where we know as a league, we can work is helping not just to develop the pool of coaches, which I think we've done a very good job working with the Coaches Association the last few years, but now developing that pool of executives as well. So that teams, regardless of where they're located, when it comes time to making those hiring decisions, that the league has a database at the ready, that there's information, deep information, on those candidates that's available to them.

Always more work to be done there, but I'm proud of our track record.

Q. This is not a PBWA meeting, so I look forward to

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talking about access later. I would love to echo Marc's sentiments. As you know, the relationship stuff is integral.

Two quick ones for you: The Ben Simmons situation beyond the fact that it was resolved and the contractual concerns that I think owners might have about a guy with so many years not playing. What, if anything, did the league learn about the mental health aspect because when you have a team and a player conceivably not seeing eye to eye about the reasons he is citing for not playing, it seemed like it got a little messy in the interim, and I think arbitration is probably coming on that front. What are the takeaways?

The second one, is there any update at all on the Robert Sarver investigation with the Suns?

ADAM SILVER: On the second part, no update on the Suns investigation. It's ongoing.

In terms of mental health issues around the league, as you know, it's something we've been spending a lot of time on, even pre-pandemic, but clearly, those issues have been magnified, multiplied during the pandemic, and for all of us. I'm sure all of you as well. Enormous additional stress.

As you said, the Ben Simmons situation specifically, it's hard for me to comment on that. I really don't have any of my own information on that, but around the league teams have committed additional resources to dealing with the mental, spiritual well-being of their players. I think it's something that we have talked a lot more about in terms of all our community programs, and it's another area where I really don't have any doubt we can do more. The Players Association is particularly focused on it.

My reaction to a little bit of the Ben and James situation, stepping back and putting aside individual dispute, it's a reminder that these are human beings in some of the most stressful jobs out there. I don't want to compare them to people putting their lives on the line and things like that. It's a whole different level of stress, but in terms of the social media bubble they live in, the coverage that all of you provide and that we're thankful for, people react to it in different ways, and it can be incredibly intense on them. We have to adjust in the way society is to understanding how social media can impact people, how the media coverage affects them.

To your earlier point, I recognize at the same time that you all need to build relationships to do your jobs, and we're the beneficiary of that coverage too for the most part, and so let's work through those issues. I was only being very specific. I think that there is, frankly, a mental health

component, too, to having somebody watch you dress. If you were designing a sports league today and you went to your head of human resources and you said -- it wouldn't even be as it was in the old days about men versus women. People wouldn't even get to that. They'd say, so what do you think for these key employees, people will come and watch them dress and interview them? Your human resources director would say, are you kidding? That's not even possible.

Now, I know we do things differently in sports, and part of it is just based on historically how we've approached issues. I just think this is an opportunity in the pandemic, and there's some real health and safety issues on top of that for all of you and our players as we're still living with this virus that we should include in the mix, but I can't believe we can't find a better way. Maybe it will require some additional appearances, additional media time from our players, but we should take a fresh look at it.

Q. Adam, you referred to the incredible symmetry of this weekend hosting this event here in Cleveland. How much of that was intentional? How much of it was coincidental, and were there any particular factors based on '97 that led to this being here now?

ADAM SILVER: It was somewhere between coincidental and intentional in that Cleveland came to us, Dan Gilbert, Len Komoroski, and said we would love to host another All-Star Game. We're in discussions with our community about upgrading our arena. If we were able to get those upgrades done and we were able to get them done roughly in this time period, would you be open to us hosting another All-Star Game? We said, absolutely. We all had fond memories of when we were last here, which happened to be our 50th Anniversary. And then as we were looking at the particular years, I think that's when the symmetry came into play.

As I said, they historically had done a great job hosting All-Star festivities here. I think part of what we look for as a league office is how eager a city is and their management to host the event. We had great relationships with them partnering, and so when then we saw it, aha, and we can do the 75th Anniversary here, and it came together.

Q. What kind of impact do you feel like the Play-In Tournament has had on the league thus far, and how do you feel about it today compared to when you decided to implement it?

ADAM SILVER: I'm more pleased with the Play-In today than I thought we would be when we were first adopting it. The reason being that when we first spoke to our television partners about it and our teams, we were very specifically

focused on those new games that we were creating and saying, here will be some additional competition. We think the notion that everything will be on the line will really create enormous fan interest. Let's try something new, and we all agreed on it.

What I wasn't anticipating is that we would create races to ensure that teams were within the first six slots in their conference so they could avoid the Play-In Tournament. While I'm sure many of my colleagues were focused on the additional competition we would create, I didn't realize that the last month of the season would be potentially enhanced by creating this incentive, in essence, to get into that ninth and 10th slot to the point where last season, if my numbers are roughly right, we had 24 teams still competing to get into the playoffs with two weeks to go, which I'm told is a record for the league.

In many ways, it's been better than we had anticipated. I don't want to overstate it because I don't have many years to go by, but we're pleased.

And you didn't ask me, but related to that, to me in terms of trying new things is then does it make sense to look at some other concepts we've talked about like an in-season tournament, and that's something now. I think in some ways the players have been more receptive to the possibility of an in-season tournament because the Play-In has been a bit more successful than I think even they projected it would be, even though it was nontraditional. In some ways our players end up being more conservative than we are when we go to them with new ideas. They say, well, that's not the way things have been done historically.

Now with the in-season we're thinking not for next year. But roughly within the same footprint we operate now, maybe we can create some new competitive opportunities, find ways to enhance competition within the season, create a new cup, trophy that players are competing for.

The short answer is, it's worked out better than we had expected.

Thank you all very much.

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