

NBA Media Conference

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Adam Silver

Media Conference



TIM FRANK: We'll start with some opening comments from the Commissioner and be glad to take your questions.

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: Thank you, Tim. I really appreciate everyone being last year.

Let me just begin with being back in Las Vegas for our Summer League. It's quite remarkable what this has turned into. I'm told that we will have an economic impact on Las Vegas of roughly \$125 million, that we will fill 70,000 hotel rooms over the course of the time that we're here and that we will sell approximately 135,000 tickets.

While I know we don't have a franchise in Las Vegas, it feels like we have a franchise in Las Vegas, certainly with the impact that we are able to have here over the summer. Of course, it's all 30 teams. As I said before, to sort of mix a metaphor from another league, it feels -- I've never been to the baseball Winter Meetings, but I'm told this is like the baseball Winter Meetings.

We just came out of a Board of Governors meeting, because they are all here. We had a Competition Committee meeting in town. We are having a meeting with our team presidents tomorrow. Our NBA officials are here training. The trainers are here training. Virtually every constituent group around the league uses this opportunity in Las Vegas to meet and learn from each other.

So thank you to the city of Las Vegas. Thank you to Governor Sisolak. He was with us at the game the other night. We appreciate his support for this event, too.

In terms of our meetings while we're here, happy to answer any questions about the Board of Governors meeting that recently concluded. But I would just say generally that it was upbeat coming out of the meeting.

People are thrilled as we head into next season. It looks like we'll be on our normal track in terms of when the season starts, in terms of our protocols around the game, particularly around the health and safety of our players. I have learned over the last two and a half years not to make any predictions when it comes to COVID, but only to say we'll be prepared for anything that comes our way.

Lastly, want to thank all of these various constituents groups I mentioned in the NBA earlier for getting us through a very difficult two and a half years. Our players have been fantastic, making all kinds of adjustments, putting up with difficult testing protocols in the past. Same for our teams.

I think it's fair to say everyone is a bit tired after this long stretch, really, going all the way back to March of 2020. I hope that everyone in our broader community gets a chance, including the media, to take a break after we get through this free agency period and before the beginning of training camp.

So with that, Tim, happy to answer any questions.

Q. I haven't been to the baseball meetings. I've been to the NFL meetings. These are way better, just so you know.

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: Thank you.

Q. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: We do good meeting.

Q. I wanted to ask you about BRI and revenue. 8.9 and over 10 for revenue so close to a pandemic, with a pandemic really still going on. I'm sure you're thrilled, but did those numbers surprise you? Has to be a pleasant surprise, I'm sure, but how did that come to pass, given all the league has had to endure the last two and a half years like the rest of the world?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: The numbers did surprise me to a certain degree because they exceeded our projections. So to the extent our projections represent where we think our business was going, surpassing \$10 billion in revenue clearly is a record for this league. I think it's quite remarkable from where we came in only two and a half years ago when it was -- the future of this industry was in question, in part because of the pandemic and also people questioning whether people would want to continue to assemble in arenas and stadiums the way they are.



I think what it demonstrated this past season was an incredible amount of pent-up demand from people to get out and be with other people. I think there is something unique and special about being around other people. Whether you're there to cheer or jeer or whatever it is, there's something really special. Particularly, I think, about arena and stadium sports.

We came off a playoff where every game was a sellout, which is remarkable. As you know, our ratings were up significantly this season. I'm pleased. I'm thankful to our fans that they came back in record numbers and continued to support our players.

I also think we were fortunate -- I've been doing this a long time -- it felt like we had a particularly competitive playoffs this year as well. So again, I'm always cautious in making predictions, because we've all learned the hard way with this virus that things can happen, that with variants and other aspects of it that are not currently being predicted.

But as I said, I think our meetings in town have been upbeat because people feel like we're through the worst of it and we are back on track for next season.

Q. Back in February, you talked about how having stars making trade demands was not necessarily good for the league. Curious when you have Kevin Durant, one of the two or three biggest stars in the league making a trade demand, days before his own four-year extension even kicks in, what's your response when you see that or what's your reaction when you see that?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: My view hasn't changed. I don't know whether his -- whether he requested a trade or demanded one, frankly.

Look, this needs to be a two-way street. Teams provide enormous security and guarantees to players and the expectation is, in return, they will meet their end of the bargain. I'm realistic that there's always conversations that are going to go on behind closed doors between players and their representatives and the teams. But we don't like to see players requesting trades, and we don't like to see it playing out the way it is.

I mean, ideally, especially as I was just saying in response to the last question, the basketball was fantastic this past season, the playoffs, we had a wonderful Finals. I don't want to be naïve, but I would love the focus to be on the play on the floor.

And as to what we can do about this issue, again, when a

player asks to be moved, it has a ripple effect on a lot of other players, on that player's team and other teams. So it's not just potentially the league or the team governors who are impacted by that, but lots of other players as well.

It's one of those issues that as we move into this collective bargaining cycle, which we are just beginning now, we intend to discuss with our Players Association and see if there are remedies for this. Again, as I said, it will never be the case when players won't be unhappy in certain situations, but we don't want to see it playing out the way it is now.

I think it is something where there is mutuality of interests between the players collectively and the league, having more stability. So that's something we'll be discussing with the union.

Q. When you mentioned things are getting back to normal with regard in part to the health and safety protocols, what exactly does that look like as you see it now? I know you're not going to make necessarily predictions, but in terms of testing and other things that have been in place, what do you see changing?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: What it looks like to me is people who are symptomatic would test, and would be tested quickly. And to the extent a player or a member of the staff is positive, they would then, whatever the state of the protocols are then, whether there's antivirals available to them, but certainly they would be separated from the team.

My assumption is there would probably be some mask-wearing. Not required of fans, unless local municipalities require it. But in the bowels of the arena, where people are proximate and trainers and others are working on players. To the extent there are relatively simple things we can do to reduce risk of transmission, we would do those as well.

But I don't see much more beyond that, at least right now. I think it's going to seem, as it essentially did for most of the playoffs, very much like the pre-COVID protocols we were following then. But as you mentioned, you never know what's coming.

Q. Would that include testing of unvaccinated players, or would that go away also?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: Well, the testing, what we are doing now, regardless of vaccinated or not, if you're symptomatic, you would be tested. I mean, as we well know, I mean, as I understand it, the fact that you're vaccinated won't prevent you from getting COVID but can

dramatically reduce the symptoms.

It's still important that we test those people both because it may be the case that they can be treated with an antiviral and help their recovery, but also to help to ensure that they are not transmitting it to others.

Q. You mentioned the CBA negotiations going on. Where do those stand in terms of what you updated the governors on and where do things sit?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: We're in very early stages with the Players Association. Again, they have a relatively new executive director in Tamika Tremaglio. I think she's in the the process of getting up to speed with the union staff and her Executive Committee. We are building a relationship, she and I and her group and our team.

We both recognize that this is around the right time that we should start engaging with each other and exchanging data and having a better understanding of what both sides' needs and issues are.

Q. In terms of Brittney Griner, there's a definite school of thought that if it were LeBron James or Tom Brady in Russia that they would be home by now. Obviously the situation is extremely nuanced and complicated, but I'm curious what has the NBA been able to do to bring her home at this point?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: I can't speak to how obviously our government or society would react to a different athlete and one that would have been better known from day one.

I will say, though, that from the NBA standpoint, we, working with our sister league, the WNBA, are doing everything in our power to bring her home. We've had, from early days, extensive discussions with the administration, State Department, her family, her representatives.

I mean, as we have now discussed publicly, it was suggested to us early on that we should not be drawing attention to her because the likely demand would increase in terms of a trade to get her potentially out of the country.

But I know even her wife was quoted the other day as saying that she is satisfied with everything the Biden administration is doing right now.

So I honestly don't know much more it is that we can be doing. I think our players, NBA players did an excellent job in drawing more attention to the situation during the Finals.

I wasn't there but I watched the WNBA All-Star Game from Chicago, and obviously Brittney was there in spirit and well-represented by her fellow players.

So the position I'm in, I'm accepting that the administration is doing everything they can, recognizing that there are some seriously complex geopolitical issues here, and I'm sure as invariably as they are more focused on Brittney, there are other families who are, of course, concerned about their loved ones who are being held against their will in Russia right now and are focused on getting them out. I know there are very difficult issues that the Biden administration has to face in terms of what's appropriate to put on the table.

But it's my understanding that the family is very satisfied with what they are prepared to do and are trying to do right now. I'm open to suggestions from others. Both my counterpart, Cathy Engelbert at the WNBA, and I, we talk daily about Brittney, again with her agent. We are just trying to do everything we can to get her back.

Q. Curious if the Durant situation, or situations like that, not specifically about him, was a topic for the Board here in Vegas this week? Was there much discussion about it, and is there anything in the CBA that prevents teams from saying, we want you to honor your contract?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: Well, No. 1, no. That situation was not discussed at our meeting today. And No. 2, I was only being a little bit facetious in recharacterizing something called a trade demand as a trade request. I know no one has suggested to me that Kevin Durant has said he's not willing to live up to the terms of his contract.

So to say you would like to play in another city is one thing. To say I'm not going to appear for training camp or certainly games would potentially be a violation of his contract.

I don't know what exactly is going on right now between him and his team. Certainly there's a lot of buzz in this town about possible moves, but from that standpoint, I feel more like a fan, absorbing information that way.

Q. Historically how has the league managed to keep no-trade clauses to such a minimum? It came up with Bradley Beal's signing, and yet it's just two handfuls of players that have ever had that.

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: Well, you know, there's leverage on both size. It's a marketplace. I think that I know that when we have discussions, both with our Players Association and among our teams, there is a

recognition, and I've said this before, everybody's got leverage. That's healthy in certain ways that you have players who -- Kevin Durant is a perfect example, has a talent arguably -- I just read the population is about to hit 8 billion -- that 8 billion people minus one don't have. I mean, that's how special these players are.

And there are also teams that enter into binding contracts with players and gives them rights, too. I mean we saw, unfortunately, this play out with Ben Simmons. So does that mean we can't improve the system? No.

As I said, though, it takes both us and the Players Association sitting down and I think acknowledging the principles that are at stake here, and that is the sanctity of contracts and the desire for stability that affects not just that player but other players as well.

I am hopeful. We have a very productive relationship with our Players Association. We are not necessarily going to completely eliminate players asking to be moved, but we are going to find a way to move the attention back on to the court.

Q. It's been nine months or so since ESPN's investigative report with some serious allegations against Robert Sarver and his conduct as owner of the Suns, and I know an investigation was commissioned by you guys shortly after. Been a while, obviously. Some folks have been wondering why it's taking so long. Any sense of when that may come to a fruition and what that conclusion might be?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: I'm not prepared to talk about what the conclusion might be, only to say that we are at the sort of last stage of the investigation.

As to why it takes to long, I can only say that we are talking about almost an 18-year period that the ESPN article covered in terms of his ownership. Hundreds of current and former employees that were involved over that period. And also ensuring that everyone's confidentiality, if they asked for it, is met, and ensuring due process is provided to Mr. Sarver as well.

So these things, I understand how outsiders can be frustrated and say why do these things take so long. But having been involved with many of them, these kinds of big investigations over my time at the league, the most important thing is to get it right and to take the appropriate amount of time to do so.

Q. You just mentioned that Brittney Griner's family seems pleased with what the Biden administration is doing to help her, but until last week, that really wasn't

the case. Cherelle Griner was talking a lot about her frustrations. And so I'm wondering if during that time, given the powerful political connections that the NBA has, during those few months when they really were not getting what they wanted from the administration, were you guys pushing for her at that time? Were you using those connections for that? And how to help, that a subject of conversations among the Board of Governors?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: There have been conversations individually with many different governors, but no, there wasn't a portion of the meeting devoted to her situation.

I only say, I understand the family's frustration. I think that we as a league have been using whatever connections that we have throughout this period to bring as much attention as possible to her situation. I think the notion of how to help I think is an interesting one because it's not as if -- up until now, there's been enormous frustration.

But when you're dealing with the Russian government, what is happening now, I don't think it's been clear to anybody -- maybe there's something that's been coming together it sounds like, some potential trade that people have been talking about very recently. But early on, other than, say, you know, please release her, it hasn't been clear exactly what it is people should be coalescing around.

So in my dealings with Brittney's representatives, none of them were ever suggesting to me that the league, that either the WNBA or the NBA, isn't doing everything that we can think of to try to assist the situation. Believe me, I can only imagine the frustration and what it's like to be Brittney held over there, but sometimes there's just only so much you can do.

Again, as far as what we know and what we've been told, at this point at least everybody seems to be doing the necessary things to try to get her home.

Q. For the last few years, you've been on board with high schoolers entering the draft, but I guess that's going to be addressed in the next CBA. Is there a timeline? Would you like to inform who the first class who would be eligible for that draft, when this is going to begin?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: I've been very public, back a few years ago, that my position had changed. When I first became Commissioner in 2014, I talked about raising the eligibility age to 20, and over the years, have been convinced because of a lot of societal changes, now

most recently changes with NIL, etc., and listening to Condoleezza Rice and hearing her committee's recommendations that we should move to 18.

But as I've said, it's not my unilateral ability to do that; it can only happen through collective bargaining. There were some discussions that we had when Michele Roberts was still the Executive Director as to whether that was something that we wanted to do on a one-off basis, and it didn't end up happening. I think in part because some of the players are conflicted and some of the teams are conflicted about what's right here.

I think, though, at this point, that as we sit down in our collective bargaining cycle, it will clearly be on the table. I haven't had the conversations directly with Tamika Tremaglio or the union to know exactly where they stand on it and what other issues may become part of that discussion.

I'll just add, I was down at, the Players Association runs their top 100 program, essentially the top high school players in the country. I was incredibly impressed -- they were down in Orlando, coincidentally right on the courts where we played when we were in the bubble down there. And it informally led to a discussion we were having with the Players Association about how much more we potentially can be doing to help youth basketball. I mean, as I said, that's their program and they have been at it for I think roughly 30 years and have been doing an incredible job. I don't want to interfere with what they are doing.

It just was eye-opening to me to say that it may be the case that it's in all of our interests that we start impacting with these young players, especially because in our sport they are identified at such a young age, and begin working with them on their development then, not just basketball skills but increasingly there's a focus on their mental health, their diets, just helping them build character and all of the important values around the sport.

I think there's an opportunity. It's a larger conversation than just whether we go from 19 to 18. But I'm on record -- when I balance all of these various considerations, I think that would be the right thing to do. I am hopeful that that's a change we make in this next collective bargaining cycle, which will happen in the next couple years.

Q. I know you're concerned about load management and player availability. What steps can be taken to address that, and how do you see player availability affecting your streaming rights?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: The last part of your question is it's something that I've been talking to our

teams about and the players directly; that in a world where people are paying potentially for just what they want to watch, that it may be the case that a player needs rest.

But it can't be an expectation as exists now in the bundle that will be paid the same amount for a game when our star players, in particular, don't play them and when they do. That's a business issue that has a direct impact on us and the players and something we're talking about.

In terms of load management, it will be something that we discuss as we sit down with the players and talk about the collective bargaining agreement. I think it's something where we should both be relying on the best science. Because I accept that, well, No. 1, where times have changed, I think in the old days -- Joe Dumars is in the front row, don't want to accuse you of being in the old days, but players played through certain injuries that we wouldn't want players to play through these days. It was just a different time.

So, No. 1, this isn't a time to roll the clock back and say, toughen up and you should play in these situations, because it probably shortens their careers anyway and it's counterproductive.

Having said that, there's a lot of mystery around load management. Often when you have conversations with teams, it's not even clear sometimes who has developed a program, who ultimately has the responsibility for deciding in some cases that that game three weeks from now is a game where that player should sit out.

So I think it's one of those issues we're working together with our teams and the Players Association. I think one, let's have a better understanding. As I've said this before, I'm not looking to shorten the season, but it's a conversation we should all have. What's optimal in terms of the number of games on a player's body? Let's be realistic about that.

Maybe fan expectations will change in certain ways about number of minutes. We have long rosters. I mean, one of the great things about being here in Las Vegas for the Summer League, it's incredible to see the competition and recognize most of the guys on the floor can't even make an NBA roster, and its fantastic basketball.

To me, it's like we want to make sure that we are putting our best foot forward for the fans. At the same time having a better understanding of the science, of the exertion of our players so that we don't put them in positions where they either get injured or are more likely to get injured, and where we can strike a fair balance.

Those are the principles at stake, and my sense is with good faith across the table with our Players Association, that maybe there's some additional incentives we can come up with as well. This goes a little bit to your question about streaming, is that I'm all in favor of guaranteed contracts, but it may be that on top of your typical guaranteed contract, some incremental money should be based on number of games played and results of those games. I mean, that's how most industries work where there's financial incentives, even among highly paid executives, for performance.

So all things that we should be looking at as we sit down, taking into account what sort of the modern NBA looks like.

Q. You've long talked about wanting to grow the popularity of the league. The offseason contributes to that, Kevin Durant, LeBron James movements, that adds to the conversation. But is there a concern that you're taking away or that's taking away from some of the continuity that the game has been sort of grown on in previous generations because of all the star movement?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: The star movement that is a result of free agency or trades doesn't bother me at all. I think, in fact, it creates more of a sense of renewal in certain markets and gives players and teams more opportunities to rebuild, change circumstances that may be either it's not working well for the team or the player.

I sort of just separate that from guys requesting that they get traded. That's a different situation. And I think particularly in the offseason, I think it's healthy. It creates a lot of excitement around the game. I think that as a fan, the fact that there are more opportunities for your team to rebuild, it's not about just waiting for the draft pick. Contracts are shorter and therefore guys become free agents more often than they used to in the old days isn't a bad thing.

Also, back to the last question, when you have shorter contracts, it also creates greater incentives, because as opposed to being locked in a long-term contract, that contract is coming up more often, it gives you -- again, this is just market forces, it gives you greater incentive to be focused on improving and creating more interest in yourself.

You want to find the right mix. At the end of the day, everything stems from the game. So we don't want the game to be a sideshow to social media and all the intrigue around our players.

But done properly, I think social media allows for our fans

to engage directly with (players) in ways that previously were not dreamed of. So just look to find the right balance there.

Q. The NBA and WNBA recently issued a joint statement in favor of reproductive health care and reproductive rights, and specifically cited freedom to access that. How does the league consider or not consider that, or other issues, when awarding All-Star bids? Will that particular issue be considered in future All-Star bids?

COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER: At least my feeling right now is that this is such a divisive issue in our country that it's one thing for the league to state its position; I think it's something else for us to now move into markets and start setting terms based on local law around an issue that is so divisive and so fraught in our communities.

So that's not my intention right now. I recognize that -- want to listen to our fans, listen to our players here, in terms of their feelings on these issues. But I think the greatest impact we can have as a league comes down to how we treat our own employees and our own values, as opposed to moving into other communities and dictating to them what their position should be on these issues.

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