

NBA All-Star 2023

Saturday, February 18, 2023

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Commissioner Adam Silver

Commissioner's Press Conference



TIM FRANK: Thanks, everybody, for joining us tonight. Without further ado, Adam.

ADAM SILVER: Thank you, Tim. Greetings, everyone. Wonderful to be here in Salt Lake City and Utah. Just a few opening remarks from me, and then happy to answer any questions.

Number one, my first NBA All-Star working at the league was here in Salt Lake City 30 years ago, and it's interesting to think about the contrast between then and now.

First of all, All-Star balloting back then was done based on paper ballots that were distributed in arenas. Michael Jordan was the leading vote-getter, not surprisingly, and he had roughly a million votes.

Then jump ahead to 2023. LeBron James is the leading vote-getter. Obviously, no paper ballots anymore. It's all digital. And he had close to 8 million votes. Just one contrast there.

Back 30 years ago, we had 20 international players in the NBA. We have now 120 international players. Over a quarter of our league, international players. Interestingly enough, this season our top five scorers in the league are from five different countries. And All-Stars, roughly a third or so are international players playing here this weekend.

In terms of the magnitude of All-Star, this is our largest in our history. They're estimating the economic impact here in Salt Lake City will be roughly \$280 million. That's an all-time record.

We have an all-time record in terms of hotel nights. We're occupying 33,000 hotel nights in the community here, and we have more fan events than any time in history.

Then just a few thank-yous from me. First of all, to Gail Miller and her family, of course, the prior ownership group. We awarded All-Star to Salt Lake City while they were still in place. They were passionate about bringing the All-Star back here to Salt Lake City. It wasn't lost on them when they were applying for 2023 that it would be the 30th anniversary, and that was very significant to them. So a

huge thank you.

I had an opportunity to spend some time with Gail Miller while I've been here in Salt Lake City. She's now sort of occupying that chair as the first fan, and she still attends virtually every game in her same old seats. She's just thrilled with the way Ryan and Ashley Smith are operating the team.

Speaking of Ryan and Ashley, they've been tremendous hosts for the entire NBA community that's been here. I can't think of any specific governors in recent history that have been so hands-on, not just in the planning, but they're at every event. Ryan has been on the floor. He has been coaching. He has been shooting. He has been judging. He has been running from event to event. Quite remarkable. Has enormous energy and terrific ideas about ways not just to improve operations here, but around the league. It's wonderful to have him.

I also want to thank Mayor Mendenhall and Governor Cox. They've been terrific hosts. They personally have attended many events. I've been running into them at various events that I have gone to. They couldn't have been more supportive.

Just a little bit about the season so far. This has been the single-most competitive season in our history, as a measure of team records in terms of the closeness, measured by wins and losses around the season. I think that's a reflection of the incredible quality of play we have in this league, the dramatic number of international players now in the league.

And it's interesting also that we've had probably as much player movement this year as any time in our history. I think that speaks to teams, as we got close to the trade deadline, trying to situate themselves in the best possible position going into the playoffs. In this case, over 10 percent of the entire league was moved roughly in the last week before the trade deadline.

So there's so much positive happening in this league. Again, I just end my opening remarks by thanking the people here in Salt Lake City for being such terrific hosts

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for the league.

With that, Tim, happy to answer any questions.

Q. I feel like this comes up every year. We're still navigating the space of load management and teams, even with the concessions that have been made to the schedule, the elimination of the four-in-fives and things of that nature. Some teams aren't practicing. Some teams have practiced fewer than 10 times all season, if you don't count game-day walk-throughs and shootarounds. Has anything come up with the union as far as making the season longer in terms of the 170-day format? Or is there a chance that you go to 72, 75, 78 games? Is that ever going to be on the table?

ADAM SILVER: Tim, I'll never say never ever. It's interesting. You'll recall only two seasons ago coming out of the bubble season. We played a 72-game season. Now, the footprint was slightly smaller, but it was an interesting experiment because it didn't change team behavior all that much in terms of the focus on load and players.

To your point, it's not just game play, but teams deciding not to practice, teams deciding to, you know, do whatever they can to maintain players being in an optimal position to compete during games.

It is an ongoing conversation with the Players Association. This isn't a new issue. There's nothing particularly happening this season that we haven't seen happening over the last several seasons.

I understand it from a fan standpoint that if you are particularly buying tickets to a particular game and that player isn't playing. I don't have a good answer for that other than this is a deep league with incredible competition.

But the mindset of our teams and players these days, as your question suggests, it's not just a player issue, is that they should be optimizing performance for the playoffs. The difficulty is fans of that team, of those teams, want them to do that as well.

Just think about some of the injuries we have now going into All-Star. I think for fans if you had said that if Steph Curry had missed these two games at this point earlier in the season, if it was that formulaic and people said, therefore, he would be healthy today and he would be here, maybe people would take that trade-off.

It's something that -- I don't think we're approaching it necessarily in an adversarial way with the Players

Association. We're working collectively together with our doctors, our data scientists and trying to see if there's an optimal way for player performance.

If it means at some point we conclude that we're better off elongating the schedule to reduce back-to-backs, for example, that's something that's worth looking at. If we thought it made sense to reduce the number of games, we would. But there's no data right now that suggests, as I said, based on some prior experiments or even as we look at the data over the course of the season and when players get injured, it isn't -- you would think that it would be the case that injuries would increase as the season goes on, and that's not necessarily it either. It may be that there's a fair degree of randomness in terms of when players get injured.

I'll say one thing. I know that talking to players, I think part of the realization these days in playing in this league is that this is a year-round pursuit now. I think part of injury avoidance means how players are treating their bodies year-round, how teams are interacting with players year-round, and using the best data to conclude what is it that will allow players to stay healthy and on the floor as long as possible.

That's a very long-winded way of saying we are very focused on it. We hear it from our fans when players aren't there. We think we can do a better job, but we don't have a specific solution yet.

Q. You mentioned 10 percent of the league moving ahead of the trade deadline, and that includes some pretty big-name players, namely Kyrie Irving, and in the case of Kevin Durant, someone who had a lot of time and money left on his contract. KD said today that he feels like -- I'm summarizing -- but that's good for the league because of the attention it draws. Where do you fall on that?

ADAM SILVER: Well, where I fall -- when it comes to player movement, I generally think that's positive. In fact, we designed this current collective bargaining agreement with shorter contracts, for example, with the way free agency works, to allow for that.

I think for fans, you don't want your team to be locked into mediocrity. You want teams to be in a position with smart management where they can rebuild or make smart moves or, frankly, with both teams and players, work themselves out of bad relationships.

That's very different than a so-called demand for a trade. I think that, in fact, the Players Association has agreed with us in our current collective bargaining agreement there are

rules against making public trade demands.

I've said that many times before. I think that's a bad thing. I think it's corrosive to the system. Certainly fans don't like it. Even lots of players don't like it as well because, ultimately, they may be going to a particular team under a belief that that player is still going to be there.

As my colleague Joe Dumars has pointed out to me many times, lots of players, long time, have behind the scenes asked for trades, but they haven't been accommodated because ultimately the teams have concluded that's not in their interest.

You want to find the right balance. You want, obviously, players to honor their contracts, and at the same time a certain amount of player movement is good.

So strongly against anything said publicly. I agree that a certain amount of player movement is good, but I think it has to be done in partnership and honoring those agreements that players and teams enter into.

Q. Adam, there's a regional sports network at the very least that's in a tenuous situation. About half the league's teams have local broadcasts through that company. In the short term, what is your concern about that had situation and maybe the idea that games are not broadcast? And then long term, what steps is the league taking to preserve local broadcast rights?

ADAM SILVER: Short term, I'm not all that concerned. It largely affects the regular season for the NBA in terms of distributing, delivering those games directly to our consumers. And if they were to indeed, you know, file for bankruptcy, there won't be that much of the regular season left. For that period of time, we will have in place arrangements, if necessary, to continue to distribute those games to fans. So I think that's what's most important.

I would say long term I'm not that concerned because there are many other ways, platforms, including local over-the-air television, streaming services, other methods, to bring those games linear and digitally directly to fans.

In the mid-term, it's an issue we're going to have to work through. It is our hope -- we've been in extensive discussions with Diamond, the company you're referring to, about a potential restructuring, and I'm fairly optimistic we'll be able to work something out with them.

As I said, if we can't, we will make sure we have a system in place for delivering those games to fans.

Q. I want to go back to the load management for a minute and just ask, are the players playing enough? And the amount of games missed without serious injury, how big of a problem is that for the NBA?

ADAM SILVER: I'm not sure. You see, I hesitate to weigh in on an issue as to whether players are playing enough because there is real medical data and scientific data about what's appropriate.

Sometimes to me the premise of a question as to whether players are playing enough suggests that they should be playing more; that, in essence, there should be some notion of just get out there and play. Having been in the league for a long time, having spent time with a lot of some of our great legends, I don't necessarily think that's the case.

The world that we used to have where it was just get out there and play through injuries, for example, I don't think that's appropriate. Clearly, I mean, at the end of the day, these are human beings -- many of you talk to and know well -- who are often playing through enormous pain, who play through all kinds of -- you know, I hesitate to label them injuries, but play through all kinds of aches and pains on a regular basis.

The suggestion I think that these men in the case in the NBA somehow should just be out there more for its own sake, I don't buy into.

I think, on the other hand, then there's the fan aspect of it saying, all right, well, if that's going to be the case, that players are not going to be able to participate in a certain amount of games, what should the response be from the league, and how should you be presenting your product?

It's interesting, because even given where we are now, I don't think the issue is quite what some suggest. I mean, our stars are not missing that many games for resting. I mean, we have injuries. I think we would all agree that's a separate issue. But sort of as a measure of single games missed, it's not that bad.

But if we were, I think, to suggest that that is going to be the case going forward, I then look at the data and think, all right, well, this year we're going to have -- we're going to likely break the all-time record for tickets sold. We're likely going to have the all-time record for season-ticket renewals.

So our fans aren't necessarily suggesting that they are that upset with the product that we're presenting, and our television ratings are holding up despite the earlier question about the decline in certain traditional cable

infrastructure.

We may need to reset in a certain way in terms of expectations. I think there are some things around the edges we can do in talking to Players Association that may create a bit more incentive for certain players.

But I think there are a few prominent examples out there of certain players who have been in the league for a long time who legitimately may need on their bodies additional amount of rest that aren't necessarily indicative of the greater league where you have literally the most competitive people in the world who want to be out there every night playing at full strength.

So, as I was saying to Tim before, I think we have to continue studying this. At the end, there's a marketplace of fans who at the end of the day are the ultimate adjudicators of whether this is a product worth watching and paying for. Right now, they're telling us that they love the NBA, and they're attending and watching it at record levels.

But we're very focused on it.

Q. Tamika Tremaglio was just talking across the street at the Hyatt and said it's absolutely a priority for the union to get a deal done by this March 30 opt-out date. From your standpoint, what are the issues that could prevent that from happening and you guys not getting something done by then?

ADAM SILVER: Tim, I would just say it's an absolute priority for us as well to get a deal done as soon as possible. I think at least what we have discussed across the table from the Players Association is that we wouldn't publicly list the issues that are potentially keeping us apart.

I would just say as a general matter, some of the questions I've already received, I think for us our greatest focus is having the greatest competition possible out there. I think we've made great headway over the years as we've improved the system to have more competition, as we're seeing, clearly, from this season.

I think you need more data to know whether the season is an aberration or whether it's a result, in part, of the system we now have in place. The league's view is that there are changes that we can make that will make the league even that much more competitive.

Q. Is it fair to expect that a deal will be done by then?

ADAM SILVER: It's my hope that the deal will be done by then.

Q. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions about this weekend. First of all, I think a lot of fans are going to be very excited about the live draft tomorrow night. I think many of them may also be very surprised that it's not happening in a traditional order. Did someone ask for that, or what was the league's thought process on that? Then just asking about tonight, I know there have been discussions for years about how to bring the Dunk Contest back to its more competitive roots. At one point, you guys were talking about maybe a monetary incentive. Are you still continuing having those discussions? I don't know what's in the CBA about participation in All-Star Weekend to begin with. Can you expand that out to Saturday? Just asking about the weekend.

ADAM SILVER: In terms of the draft before the game, that came about between discussions of the league and the Players Association. As you know, we've modified the All-Star in several different ways over the years, just continue to try to make it that much more interesting for fans. We thought this would be an interesting experiment to do a draft right before the game. Thought it would just add a bit more excitement to it.

In terms of All-Star Saturday Night, there are currently provisions in the CBA that address participation in All-Star Saturday Night. They don't require players to dunk. And I've understood that. I think that it would be an awkward position to say to a player: You must enter the Dunk Contest.

I think, again, I would say for All-Star Saturday Night, interestingly enough, the Dunk Contest, despite the criticism I hear, has continued to be the most popular event on Saturday night.

Let's see what happens tonight. I think we've got some great dunkers out there. I recognize that in the old days there was a bit more of a tradition of certain superstars who wanted to participate in the Slam Dunk.

I think part of it, again, the world changes. I think back then, when you would see some of those great stars dunking, their games were not available on your phone, every single one of them, every night, and highlights weren't available on multiple platforms 24/7 the way they are now. There were different incentives to present themselves to the world.

We have to adjust. So we'll see. We'll see how it goes tonight, and we'll make additional changes if we think it's necessary.

Q. (On the reserves being selected first in the All-Star



Draft.)

ADAM SILVER: I'm sorry. Yeah, that was just -- that's what we decided when we sat down with the union. We would do the reserves first.

Q. In the future would it be possible to have a type of competition, a type of tournament, between NBA teams and EuroLeague teams? Not just friendly games.

ADAM SILVER: Over the years we've had some different tournaments where NBA clubs have played European clubs. I'm sure you recall we had the McDonald's Championship many years ago.

It's something we'll continue to look at. I think it's a question of creating the best possible competition. Part of the issue is our cycle of our season versus the EuroLeague. I don't think it's realistic that a team, for example, would finish the Finals, after what we've all talked about is a very long season, and then go yet play in another tournament. And then often, because of player movement in this league, it's a different team the following fall, and they're not conditioned yet. They haven't had an opportunity to gel with the team, and then they would enter it directly into competition.

I think long term the way we should be looking at this is -- and it may address the issue of the long regular season. I mean, for example, we've talked about an in-season tournament to create some additional excitement during the regular season. It may be that at some point there's an in-season tournament, but it includes clubs from outside the NBA. So those are all ideas we'll continue to look at.

Q. How do you think the Celtics handled the Ime Udoka situation? Has the league learned anything from this? Is he subject to a personal conduct issue if he returns to coach? Has the league learned or will it take more seriously workplace situations like that?

ADAM SILVER: Well, I think the league takes extraordinarily seriously workplace situations. In the first instance, as it works in the NBA, it's for the individual club to handle a workplace situation.

I think in this case I have no reason to believe they didn't handle Ime's situation appropriately. I'll leave it at that. I think they handled it appropriately.

Q. Curious about the Garden's use of facial recognition technology. I know the league's stance has been that there is no prohibition on this, but according to the reporting that's been out there, they've used this essentially to target anyone, whether

fans or potentially media, who are critical of them. I'm curious more about, does the league view this as inappropriate use of the technology for that team or any other in your league?

ADAM SILVER: Howard, I have never heard that Madison Square Garden is using facial recognition technology to target members of the media. I would say in terms of their use of it currently directed at those who are litigating against them, as I've said previously, our only rules are that they comply with local law.

From everything we understand right now, Madison Square Garden is complying with local law. At least, so far, we have not deemed it appropriate that we should be stepping into those situations.

Q. Wanted to ask, recently anti-trans legislation was passed here in Utah. Utah Governor Spencer Cox was asked about whether or not the All-Star Game would be affected by that. He said, "We've had those discussions with the NBA for quite a while. That's really changed. They're trying to get a little bit more out of those culture wars as well." Is that something that you agree with, and in general, how should the NBA approach human rights issues?

ADAM SILVER: Well, I think our track record is absolutely clear for decades about our focus on human rights issues. I would say in terms of a specific issue in a state or in a market, they're all specific to that situation. I would just say we don't have a general policy going into it.

I think here we've worked successfully, as I said earlier, with Governor Cox on bringing this All-Star Game to Utah. I think we've ensured that for working directly with the Utah Jazz that certainly for all our events, whether in the arena or the fan events outside the arena, that we absolutely protect the individual civil rights of any of the participants.

Q. After a three-year postponement, Indianapolis will get the All-Star Game next year. I'm curious about your feelings about that and also what Herb Simon has meant to this league.

ADAM SILVER: Herb Simon is currently our longest-standing governor in the NBA. He has been a force of innovation and constructive change over the years. I think other governors in the league would say he has done extraordinary service to the league.

He is a former chairman. He serves on the equivalent of our executive committee. He has become a close friend of mine. I know that even for incoming new governors into the league, Ryan Smith being just the most recent

example, I know he has made himself available to them to say with my decades of experience now in the NBA, please call me if there's any way I can assist you.

I'm thrilled that we were able to reschedule that COVID All-Star Game to Indianapolis. I know Herb Simon and his son Stephen are here. Rick Fuson, team president, is here, together with a team of people from the Pacers and Indianapolis to study the great things that Ryan and Ashley are doing here and the community is doing here.

As I love about our teams, seeing if they can up it yet another notch when we get to Indianapolis. So I'm already looking forward to it.

Q. I'm wondering if there's any concern with the seemingly very stark difference in opinion of some superstars feeling like they should be able to make public trade demands and you calling it corrosive. Is there any concern that this is such a hot-button issue that this could lead to a breakdown in potential CBA negotiations?

ADAM SILVER: I'm not because, as I said earlier, we already have agreed with the Players Association that public trade demands are inappropriate. It currently exists as conduct detrimental in our CBA, and that has not been an area of discussion between us and the Players Association.

Q. With the league being as talented and as deep as ever, have there been any discussions on expansion recently?

ADAM SILVER: There haven't been any discussions on expansion recently. What I've said before, because the topic comes up a lot, I would say mainly people asking me or others in the league about it is that it is natural at some point that an organization expands. In this case because we're both in a CBA cycle and a national media cycle, our current deals are up in two and a half years.

The view from our governors has been let's figure out exactly what the new CBA looks like, let's figure out what our new media deals look like. Then let's think about expansion.

So invariably we will. There's no active discussions in the league office right now, but we'll turn back to it in a few years.

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