

# NBA Media Conference

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## Adam Silver

Media Conference



ADAM SILVER: We just finished two days of committee meetings with our Board of Governors and general session as well. Very productive meetings. A lot of discussion about the game. Came off a successful Summer League. Fair amount of discussion around the World Cup of Basketball, which roughly a hundred current or former NBA players participated in. A great global stage for the game. And a bit of discussion about some of the rule changes for this season, with a real focus on player participation.

I know you've all now seen the release from the vote we took earlier today regarding a changed approach to reinforcing the notion that we're an 82-game league. That's something that Joe Dumars, our Executive Vice President of Basketball Operations, has been really reinforcing, and I think someone who has the credibility to help the league, frankly, reset on that issue.

I just want to make the point there that it's a shared view by everyone in the league. It's not just coming from the league office. I think whether it's our teams, our Players Association, individual players, I think there's an acknowledgment across the league that we need to return to that principle, that this is an 82-game league.

That, of course, doesn't mean that we're turning the clock back, that players are expected to play through injuries or that players, frankly, never need rest. But I think there's a statement of a principle that, if you're a healthy player in this league, that the expectation is that you're going to play.

With that, happy to answer any questions you have.

**Q. With the new policy, how long had you been working on this, how much input was there from the Players Association and do you worry that this might be seen as kind of an over-interjection by the league into player and team health choices?**

ADAM SILVER: In terms of how long we've been working on it, I would say with a more serious focus, roughly in the last year it became part of the collective bargaining, I should say. The Player Participation Policy is part of many steps we've taken. Whether it's in the bargaining agreement itself, the 65-game limit for eligibility for awards,

creating different incentives for players, like the Play-In Tournament, for example, like the In-Season Tournament, to focus attention on the regular season. But the policy itself, I think it was, the Players Association was very much a part of it. We had extensive discussions with them. Then with individual groups of players, particularly veterans in the league, about how they thought we should be approaching it.

And the last part of your question. Yes, I do worry about infringing on how a team operates. While we want to state a strong principle, I would say at least initially we're taking a somewhat light touch here. I think under the notion that change will probably happen here incrementally. I think we'll state this principle, see how teams react and see if more needs to be done.

But I think most importantly there's a sense from all the different constituent groups in the league that this is ultimately about the fans and that we've taken this too far. I mean, this is an acknowledgment that it's gotten away from us a bit, particularly I think when you see young, healthy players who are resting, and it becomes maybe even more a notion of stature around the league as opposed to absolute needed rest, or it's just part of being a NBA player that you rest on certain days. That's what we're trying to move away from.

**Q. Mostly what the media has been told throughout this is that the science determines whether a player should sit or if he should play, depending upon the schedule. A lot of that comes from the teams as opposed to the players, at least the perception is. What is the pie on that from what the team feels like is the best for them, versus the players feeling like what's best for them, versus the league that has a bigger picture to worry about?**

ADAM SILVER: Honestly, that's what I'd been told as well, that it was the science. I think it may be why the league didn't become involved maybe as deeply as we should have earlier on. Part of the discussion today was about the science and, frankly, the science is inconclusive.

I think -- and I said this before -- if the science were clearer

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that players should be resting, we would be favoring it and, frankly, I would be delivering the message to the fans even that you want these players to rest at certain times because that's going to keep them healthier and performing at a higher level and ensuring that they're on the floor at critical times in the season.

What we talked about today is that the correlation -- putting aside causation -- isn't there. Even with players who have participated in summer competitions like World Cups and Olympics, they are not more likely to get injured in that season. We don't see any statistical data suggesting that players increase their likelihood of getting injured as they go further along in the season. Or even in back-to-backs, which may surprise people.

I think one of the things that we're all learning with data and science is not to take anything for granted. See Sudafed, most latest disclosure. That's something we all thought was clearly working. Maybe isn't.

But I think in the case here, that part of the commitment here for from the league office is we are putting together a group of team doctors and scientists and others and trying to better understand it. One thing I want to make clear, the message to our teams and players is not that rest is never appropriate. And realize, there's a bit of an art to this, not just a science. That's with the hands-on trainers and coaches who are talking to players and saying, how do you feel. I'm certainly not saying that's not relevant.

I think at least in the first instance in terms of this policy, we're trying to deal with some of the most egregious examples, where multiple star players, for example, healthy, healthy, all out on the same night, healthy, healthy. I think we're letting down the fans, we're letting down our partners by doing that. But at the same time, we're stating a principle in terms of an 82-game league and saying, let's all work together. I think that was, I thought, the best news coming out of this policy. Whether it was with the Players Association, individual players or with our teams over the last two days. everyone is acknowledging this is an issue and it's an issue for the fans.

The adoption of the policy was unanimous. There was full support from the Players Association. I think, though, people are also saying, well, let's see what this means in practice. What does it mean when a league doctor is coming in and separately looking at a player's health. I do think this policy will deal with the most egregious examples, and we'll go from there.

I just think, lastly, that even though the teams are highly competitive with each other, they shouldn't be competing when it comes to health and the science of performance

and care for our players. Especially since contracts have gotten shorter, players move from team to team. I think we're declaring, also, there's more to be learned here. I think rather, in all seriousness, like the Sudafed example, saying, let's really not just take for granted somebody saying load management. Well, of course you need to rest after this many days. Let's really study it and understand it and see if there are changes we need to make.

It may turn out -- you know, a lot of older players, by that I mean now, at this point, retired players, when I first came in the league, used to believe that they were more likely to get injured if they took nights off, that they would get out of rhythm. In some cases maybe played fewer minutes, but they played. That's something we want to look at as well.

**Q. It's been nearly five years since Paul Allen died. We know he intended for the Trail Blazers to be sold. We also know that the NBA requires a team held by an estate to be transferred within a reasonable time period. I wonder if the Board has discussed compelling a sale of the Blazers and if so what has it decided?**

ADAM SILVER: The Board has not discussed compelling a sale of the team. And obviously, within a reasonable time is subject to interpretation. In the case of Paul Allen's estate, it's one of the largest estates in American history and highly complex in terms of his assets. I've spoken directly to Jody Allen, his sister and the trustee of the estate, and they are working through those issues, and in the meantime continue to operate the team in a first-class manner.

**Q. The issue of load management has been around for a long time. But I guess the unique part is that only the NBA is the problem that its stars would sit like an important game, in all leagues in the U.S. or in the world. How do we get from load management to actually missing, for a star, missing big games? And could something be done earlier without doing like a new policy or a new rule?**

ADAM SILVER: Yeah, I can't speak to other leagues in the world. I mean, you have more expertise there. But certainly I know in international soccer star players do rest occasionally. So that's --

**Q. The difference is that for big games, a star wouldn't rest.**

ADAM SILVER: Well, but I feel in our league, I mean, certainly in the playoffs there's no history of load management or resting there. I mean, I guess it depends how you define a big game. But I don't want to suggest it's

not an issue.

I think to your question, what we are all exploring, and I think the good news is every constituent group is saying, yes, how do we fix this. I mention teams and players, but that includes trainers and includes team doctors and everyone else, saying, there must be a better approach to this.

Part of it is I think as a league we can compile better data. There's been so much discussion about artificial intelligence. We're seeing already the applications of AI to medical care. There's so many MRIs and X-rays that go on in this league, the ability to look back now when a player is injured and then to look at those earlier scans and say, all right, was there something that previously wasn't detected or are there indications of when a player is more likely to get injured, under what conditions. So, yes, the goal is to avoid it and not to continue this trend.

I'll just add, I mean, we've discussed this in the past, some people suggest, well, there may be too many games. But as I said, the data isn't even clear that as the season goes on that you're increasing the likelihood of injury. It might have an effect on performance, but not necessarily on injury.

So I think AI may be very helpful here in taking mass amounts of data from our teams, from -- you know, the players are now tracked. In terms of load, I think a positive thing there, you're tracking the amount of movement in practice, often in sleep, nutrition, everything else, that maybe when the teams all put their heads together and don't compete in that area, we're going to come up with some answers, with the ultimate goal being keeping players healthy and longer and productive on the floor.

**Q. What kind of role did partners and/or the media, the networks, play in this decision with the load management?**

ADAM SILVER: They all played a role. I referenced before I think the larger constituent groups. No doubt we are a business and part of the issue here, that in some cases those partners are proxy for fans and in some cases we're hearing directly from the fans. But when it comes to the media, no secret, we've had a policy in place for the last few years regarding so-called network games, with the acknowledgment, and maybe it seems unfair in some cases, that not all games are equal. That certainly doesn't feel that way to the family that happened to be going to that game where a player was resting. But at least in terms of the scale of the audience we're reaching when we're a network game, we acknowledge that and sent the message to the teams that, to the extent there needs to be

a certain amount of rest, don't rest your players on that night. And certainly don't rest multiple star players on any night.

I think what we've tried to do as the league office is work through all of the different issues, recognizing genuine concern from the fans and, of course, the media that is paying for the opportunity to broadcast those games, but also at the same time taking into account player health, not looking to turn the clock back, not suggesting that any player should be playing when you're injured.

**Q. Kevin Porter Jr. is facing some pretty serious charges. The alleged details of that case, at least what we have seen reported so far, are pretty horrific. In the past, your league has been very deferential toward law enforcement and the judicial system, waiting for these things to play out before you step in or enforce any kind of discipline. Can you just elaborate on what that policy is right now and whether you expect that that will be the same approach with this case? Will Kevin Porter be allowed to continue to practice and play when teams report at the end of this month?**

ADAM SILVER: So, one, yes, the allegations here are horrific. No question about it. But I don't know anything more, of course, about the actual facts, other than reading those allegations. We have a domestic violence policy that was collectively bargained with the Players Association. Again, when I say bargained, I mean, not a contentious issue. They certainly feel as strongly as we do about the issue.

Every case, though, also depends on its unique facts. I think here when we're not in season, there's a little bit more of an opportunity to absorb what's happening before we act. I think if it were a case where we were in the middle of a season, we might be compelled to do something faster. So while ultimately we're required to be deferential to law enforcement when there's an investigation, and clearly there's an investigation now, I think this has given us the opportunity, because we're not in season, training camps haven't opened yet, to take a little bit of time here to better understand the situation.

One thing I learned over many years of working on these cases is not to assume anything here and not just rely on headlines, but to try to truly understand what's happening here as a combination of what law enforcement has learned and direct interviews. We're still now in the process of gathering information.

**Q. I want to follow up on that. By my understanding, a team and the league cannot both levy punishment for the same case at the same time. If you guys are**



**undergoing your own investigation, will Kevin Porter Jr. be available to participate and play once training camp and the preseason starts?**

ADAM SILVER: So there is, in essence, a double jeopardy provision. The league and the team can't act independently. But that's independent of whether or not he'll be made available. I mean, certainly we and the team are talking to each other. While we're investigating, the team can't then go off and act independently. But sort of what I was suggesting, we have a bit of time to decide whether it will be appropriate for him to go to training camp or not.

**Q. One other legal dispute. With the Raptors and the Knicks, how egregious do you see the allegations in there to what you think is the norm when people leave teams in the NBA, and were you surprised that the Knicks didn't try to settle that internally within some kind of NBA parameter rather than the lawsuit?**

ADAM SILVER: On that dispute, I don't know more than what I read in the complaint that was filed in federal court. So I don't have a sense yet of how egregious it is. I haven't had an opportunity to see what the Raptors' response is. I think this ultimately may end up in front of me, so I think it's appropriate for me to withhold judgment.

**Q. You've stood in front of us multiple times since basically the pandemic has ended. Here in New York, the Knicks, their decision maker hasn't stood forth in the public since he has taken position. What is the league's standing on such a thing? Is there a particular policy that you can enact? Is there any pressure that you can put on a franchise to be publicly accountable?**

ADAM SILVER: Well, in terms of being publicly accountable, I don't think that's necessarily about what an organization chooses to say to the media. I mean, you all have a role to play in that and deciding how to cover a team and the point of view expressed. And, of course, ultimately, the fans do, too. I think that's where accountability lies. They haven't violated any of our league rules. Our league rules, the ones that have been collectively bargained, apply to players, which for the most part are the people that the fans are most focused on.

Certainly from my standpoint and the league's, we have a long track record of talking directly to the media and being transparent about the decisions we make. Every team has to make its own decisions on how they want to operate.

**Q. With the first season of the In-Season Tournament coming up, have you discussed internally what**

**barometers for success look like, in terms of gauging fan interest, especially for something that is kind of being born out of blue sky? And how quickly can you tell whether it's generating the interest you're looking for? Is that a one-season thing or a five-season thing?**

ADAM SILVER: Start with the last question. I think it is a multi-season issue. To the extent we're looking to create a new tradition here, as the saying goes, new traditions aren't created overnight. So I think this, it will need to build over time.

Having said that, there are objective measures we'll be able to look at in its first season. One, certainly attendance, versus those regular-season games, maybe what it might have been versus typical games at that same time in the season. Obviously television ratings, social media interest, coverage. Those are all things that we look at.

I think then something that will be a little less tangible is a sense of the energy on the floor. I mean, I think for all of us who follow the league, if you watch 30 seconds of a game you can tell the difference, for the most part, between playoff games and regular-season games. They're played with a different sense of intensity. I think here, if we're seeing early indications of success, you're going to see something a little bit ratcheted-up intensity than you see during a typical regular-season game. I think that will be a sign of success here.

I think ultimately it will be the fans, the coverage, which will be telling us whether this is working or not. But ultimately the decision will be multi year. I'll just add, I think as most new things we've tried in this league, that we iterate as we go. My sense is we're very happy where it stands right now -- pool play, knockout round, et cetera, in terms of the format. I'm sure we're going to learn a lot once it starts. So I wouldn't be surprised if, when we go through it, we make a decision to make a few changes along the way.

**Q. You passed a new CBA some months ago. We're now currently in that. It looked like one of the major thrusts of that, of course, was to try to make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to create super teams. Phoenix is sort of doing it anyway. I'm curious how you feel about the way the system is or is not working already with respect to that.**

And then, unrelated, but I'm just going to jam it in there anyway, James Harden and Damian Lillard have both issued trade demands. You guys have had to act, in some respect or another, on both of those because of the way they became public. Those things are still kind of hanging out there with the camps a few weeks away. And then we

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went through this, you've talked in the past about trade demands and forced trades, the whole Ben Simmons saga, so I know you have some feelings on that as well. So curious about both of those.

ADAM SILVER: Yeah, in terms of trade demands, of course, don't like them. As a league, we want players and teams to honor their contracts. I'm watching both the situation in Portland and Philadelphia and hope they get worked out to the satisfaction of everyone before the season starts. I'm glad that things seem to have settled down somewhat at least in terms of public discourse.

On super teams, just to be clear, I think from a league standpoint we love super teams as long as they're formed in a way that seem competitively fair across the league. Smart drafting, smart trades, et cetera, as opposed to one team has the ability to spend an enormous amount more than another team does. I think the new provisions in this collective bargaining agreement go a long way toward a leavening impact across the league.

In terms of what any team is doing this season, as you know, there's a transition in terms of the new rules. You asked specifically about Phoenix. I'm all in on anything that is appropriate under the current rules, and that certainly is. So, to the extent that a team sees an opportunity before the full transition into the so-called second apron and they see opportunity to do things and are willing to pay the appropriate tax, that is perfectly appropriate.

Having said that, like all the things we do in the league office, we continue to learn and work with our players and create better systems. I've seen now many versions of new provisions in collective bargaining and they almost never work precisely the way they were designed. Our teams are super sophisticated and it's their job to work the system and figure out how to win. So I'm sure we'll see with these new provisions, once they fully kick in, we'll have a better sense of how effective they are and maybe have to go back to the table to see if we can do a better job.

But, lastly, Joe Dumars said this earlier today at our meeting. At least sort of in modern NBA history, I don't remember a time when the league was so competitive. One indication being we've had five different teams win championships over the last five years. Going into this season, I think you could feel it in the room with the team governors, a real sense of excitement around this new season. I'm pleased at the state of competition, but again, new CBA, let's see how these provisions work.

I have one more thing. WNBA playoffs begin 8 o'clock

tonight. ESPN (networks).

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