

Abu Dhabi Games: Hawks vs. Bucks

Thursday, October 6, 2022

Abu Dhabi

Etihad Arena

Commissioner Adam Silver Press Conference

ADAM SILVER: Thank you all very much for being here. I am hugely excited that we're about to play our first NBA game in the Gulf region. It's been a long time coming. We've had a chance the last few days to talk about the history of NBA basketball in the Middle East. Essentially we trace it back to about 100 years ago, when largely missionaries brought from the States basketball first to Lebanon, still a powerhouse to this day in basketball. We've continued to see growth here in the region.

We've been televised now for about 35 years in the Gulf region and the Middle East.

Then in the last 30 plus years, we've conducted clinics extensively, Basketball Without Borders programs. Many of our greatest NBA players have visited the region in partnership with either FIBA, in some cases directly with the NBA, with local sports authorities. So at this point the NBA is very well known here.

We believe we've had, in the history of the NBA, roughly 25 players from the Middle East, North Africa region. It's our hope that as we continue to play games here and televise games, bring NBA information here through our new app, our new global app, which I encourage you to download, that it will encourage even more young people, frankly boys and girls, whether aspiring to play in the NBA or the WNBA, to continue playing the game.

We've had a chance over the last several days to really immerse ourselves in the community here. I attended a basketball clinic yesterday at NYU's Abu Dhabi campus. It's quite spectacular, beautiful gym. We had several hundred local players there.

We've had our Jr. NBA programs here essentially over the last week. We've had a chance to hold clinics throughout the community. We brought something called NBA District, which is immersive, interactive activities, over the last week. Really the goal so that the most number of people possible could experience the NBA while we're here. And



we opened up a new store here today for the first time.

It's really been a wonderful several days here, and we haven't even played games yet. Thank you to the Atlanta Hawks and the Milwaukee Bucks, up and down on the roster, including governors of the teams, Wes Edens, Marc Lasry, Tony Ressler; they are all here accompanying their teams.

My sense from talking to the players, they're having a wonderful time, as well. Really getting a chance, with the benefit of doing preseason games, really we can have time on the ground so they can experience the local culture, be out in the community, not just play a game and leave. That's really part of why we're here, as well.

With that, happy to answer any questions.

Q. What does it mean for the NBA organization to come here to this market, explore it in this particular way and tap into its potential?

ADAM SILVER: I mean, for me, as I said, it's the culmination really of many decades of work here. This was something that we began discussing pre-pandemic. One of the things I should have mentioned, part of the symbolism here, you can see it's largely a maskless room. People are out and about. People are comfortable being in intimate settings here, eating meals together. Part of it is, symbolically, I feel like we're back as a league.

But also I think it's an opportunity to take another step forward here in terms of the game and the NBA. There's no substitute -- I think we learned that during the pandemic -- for being on the ground, for being with people.

Despite all the wonderful things that can happen through digital technology, there's something about having our presence here. I think for a lot of our players, many of whom have not traveled a lot, they get to see firsthand really what the Emirates and Abu Dhabi is all about. It's a very special occasion for us.

Q. What's your opinion about Giannis Antetokounmpo as a player and a person, and what does Giannis



Antetokounmpo mean for the organization of the NBA?

ADAM SILVER: Where do I start? Maybe I'll start with Giannis, the person. I've gotten to know him very well over the last several years. He's just an incredible young man. I can say, for example, seeing him here in Abu Dhabi, he just loves to interact with the people here. He stays extra to be with the young people at the clinics. He's just welcoming of everyone.

I think he's very much, I feel, a global citizen. He represents Greece incredibly well. Obviously, his parents are from Africa and now living in the United States. He truly is someone who can represent many different cultures.

At the same time, I think he brings true joy to the game. You can see it in the style of play he engages in and his relationship with his teammates.

Of course Giannis as the player, as a multiple MVP, as someone who plays through injury, plays just always with incredible passion, has taken the game to the highest level, yet at the same time puts the extra time in the gym to continue to develop his game.

He is a commissioner's dream.

Q. How will NBA games be presented and experienced in five years?

ADAM SILVER: That's a really interesting question. One of the things we're working on right now is -- I come at it from two different places. One is the distribution of the games, and that is the ease of accessibility of the games over time. Part of why we launched this new app this year, if I haven't mentioned that already, is that it's one app that's globally available. For example, the game tonight, the game Saturday will be available on that app.

We recognize it has to be convenient for our fans to be able to get our games, not to be searching in many different places, different apps, different networks to try to find it. So that's one change you'll see over the coming years.

But then also the way our games are produced will change over time, as well. We feel that through these streaming platforms, through digital technology, it allows us to find new, engaging ways to present our games that will allow for more customization, personalization to the extent you want to follow a particular player, you want more data as you're watching the game, you want to be chatting with your friends or part of a larger conversation with experts.

All those things are beginning to happen now in sports, but I feel like we're just scratching the surface.

I've now been with the NBA for 30 years. I think in the next five years we're going to see a lot more development than we saw over the last 30 years. There's that much change going on in the presentation of sports right now.

Q. A couple of years ago just pre-pandemic, the NBA had a sort of similar set of exhibition games in Mumbai, and that really helped bring the sport closer to the fans. I was wondering if the NBA has any similar plans for India in the coming years.

ADAM SILVER: We do have plans to come back to India, and again, that was one of the setbacks that occurred with the pandemic. As you recall, it was the fall right before the pandemic really hit the whole world when we played those two games in Mumbai. It was an incredible experience. We had the Sacramento Kings, the Indiana Pacers. Again, both teams really embraced the experience.

Of course we have Vivek Ranadive, one of our team owners, who was born in Mumbai. So it was really a great experience. But then everything got put on hold.

We can, with 30 teams, obviously be engaging fans in the preseason on many different continents, in many different cities. So what our plans are -- Mark Tatum is here, our deputy commissioner, who oversees our international operations. I know we've had discussions about returning to India as quickly as possible.

Again, these games are special, but it's just a moment in time. I think really what we're focused on is developing the game throughout India, working with our federation FIBA, more clinics, more academies, better distribution of our games, all to try to excite young boys and girls to want to play this great game.

Q. I have a question about regular-season games in Europe. Is there any specific reason why those games have been played in one-, not two-game format? Since the teams are already there, since the time shift adjustment had been made, wouldn't it be more beneficial and obviously profitable for both NBA and European partners to have two games within 48 hours?

ADAM SILVER: It's a really interesting question. It's something we look at all the time.

We have such a dense schedule playing 82 regular-season games, that even just playing one game over in Europe, to adjust for the time, adjust for the travel, adjust for a bit of

jet lag when they get back, that it already causes a ripple effect in the schedule to do that.

One of the things we're going to begin looking at, just as our business is changing, as we have a larger global audience, is how we should potentially be rethinking the regular-season schedule. We added a play-in tournament in the middle of the pandemic. We're looking at midseason or in-season tournaments now.

We'd love to find a way as the popularity grows to maybe create windows in our schedule where teams can play more games whether it be in Europe or the Middle East or South America, you name it, in other places in the world. We recognize the interest is there, and particularly given the length of our regular season, it may create opportunities to play more games.

It's really a constraint of the schedule more than anything else now because I know our teams would -- especially given that they're making the trip already, would just as soon play twice.

Q. You already have a partnership with Viacom18, so specifically talking about Viacom18 and the partnership, how do you look at this development of the FIBA World Cup and specific plans for NBA's expansion with Viacom18?

ADAM SILVER: Again, it's hard to be too specific right now, other than we're looking to continue to grow that partnership. We have tremendous interest of the fans. Really similar to my answer to a prior question in terms of changes in how we produce our games. We think that there are many new ways that we can engage fans.

One of the benefits we have in distributing our games all over the world is we see advancements and changes and new ideas in production from 200 different markets, obviously not just the United States. We're in a position to try to take the best of that learning and working with technology companies, as well, to really think how we can customize these games so that in your market, for example, we're talking directly to the fans about things that they're interested in. People can make their own personalized selections in terms of players, teams, camera angles, different languages they can listen to telecasts. Those are all things we're thinking about.

Q. There's always this idea in professional sport that rivalries are extremely important. From the outside, at least, it feels that in the NBA that has not been the most prominent part of the NBA in recent years. Has that been felt at the organizational level, and how important do you think it is? Is there a solution to

have these intact teams for many years in a row form these kind of bitter rivalries which fans kind of like?

ADAM SILVER: You're absolutely right, and it is something we've been thinking a lot about.

I will say we've learned that you can't artificially create rivalries. They have to develop organically. Sometimes it's because teams, having come off of a hard-fought playoff match or sometimes even a Finals, that what develops naturally is that sense of a rivalry.

I think there's more we can do at the league office to promote those rivalries. It's something we are implementing this season, more the notion of these rivalry games.

So I agree with you. I think those narratives play very well with fans, the storylines around rivalries.

But again, they have to develop organically, not created from the league office.

Q. May I have your opinion about Victor Wembanyama?

ADAM SILVER: Oh, my. So through the NBA App I watched that game the other night against the G League Ignite team.

I worry, I think I could be jinxing a player who hasn't come into the NBA yet by me anointing him as the next great one. But he certainly has all the attributes of a true game changer. The physical wherewithal. He seems to have the mind to be a great player. He stepped up on that big stage against Team Ignite.

I know that many of our NBA teams are salivating at the notion that potentially through our lottery that they could get him, so they should all still compete very hard next season.

It's one thing that is remarkable I think about sport, that just as I'm speaking right now, all around the world there are young boys and now increasingly young girls who are bouncing basketballs and dreaming of being LeBron James or Giannis Antetokounmpo, Trae Young, you name it. Victor now is the product of that as a young man who grew up loving this game. Unlike players of an earlier generation, games were accessible to him. It wasn't just about watching old videotapes that Ahmad Rashad produced from the old days. All the games are available. He can model his game after current players.

I'm really excited to watch his development this year.



Obviously, he's going to get even stronger, and his body is going to fill out. I don't want to jinx him, but he's certainly an incredibly promising player.

Q. The new rule with intentional foul in transition. We have a hefty punishment. I wanted to ask you do you have any feedback about that because European NBA fans are really happy because they think that can fasten the game more?

ADAM SILVER: Thank you to European basketball, because we took the rule from you. It's probably long overdue. NBA coaches are incredibly smart and adept, and they took advantage, I think, of the old rule in a way that was unintended and served to take away one of the most exciting aspects of the game: the fast break.

I think this new rule has been so well received, many people are saying, What took so long? Obviously, we have a huge contingency of European players now in the game. They were used to playing under FIBA rules and European rules.

Again, I think it's one of the wonderful things about this game, that we adapt, we innovate, we change over time and we learn from others. In this case, we learned from European basketball.

Q. I have to ask you about Nikola Jokic. What do you think about his chances for three-peat as MVP, and when can we expect maybe a game in Serbia? Maybe if he gains that three-peat MVP award?

ADAM SILVER: So all those wonderful things I said about Giannis, ditto for Nikola. Also an incredible young man. Obviously, he plays -- big man but a different style in many ways than Giannis. Truly a magician with the ball, represents Serbia incredibly well. I'm not going to put odds out there on his chances of winning the MVP again, but another player who is just a joy to watch.

I think it's not an accident that whether in Giannis or Nikola, you see the joy in their faces, just their love of the game, their love of their teammates, their love of competition.

Again, I just look forward to watching him again this season.

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