

Mexico City Game: Heat vs Spurs

Saturday, December 17, 2022

Mexico City, Mexico

Mexico City Arena

Commissioner Adam Silver

Press Conference

ADAM SILVER: Thank you so much. Thank you all for being here. It's fantastic to be back here in México City. As you all know, the last time we were here was the fall of 2019. Everybody knows what happened after that, and that accounts for our absence over the last few years.

Most importantly, this is our 30th anniversary of having played games here in México City, and actually not surprisingly, it's the 31st game, today's game, that we will have played in México.

In that intervening time, over the last three decades, we've experienced tremendous growth of the game here in México. It's now a top-five market outside the U.S. and Canada for the NBA. We know that because of our social media following, because of the number of League Pass subscriptions we sell, merchandise sales and all the other indications of success.

One really exciting development since we were last here was the launch of our G League franchise here, Capitanes, which plays in this same arena. They played here last night against the Austin Spurs. Had a terrific audience. We will play at least 24 regular-season games in this arena this year for Capitanes. That means not only will they be playing other G League teams in the United States, but U.S. G League teams will be rotating through México City.

We think that's an important next step in terms of the development in this market. It gives us an opportunity to better understand what it means to operate on the ground here in México City, dealing with local culture, obviously a different language, all the other circumstances around possibly having an NBA franchise here one day.

We announced it last time we were here. We fulfilled that promise, and it's created enormous excitement in the market.

In addition, we now have an NBA Academy here in México. We think continuing to develop the pipeline of young talent



is critically important. We have other grassroots efforts. Our Jr. NBA programs. We do a lot of online education around the sport of basketball. All the things that are necessary to continue growing this market.

Lastly, of course, let me thank the San Antonio Spurs and the Miami Heat for making the trip here. It seems to be in the Spurs' backyard. A little longer of a trip for Miami. I had an opportunity to speak to both coaches and some of the players before the game. They both had the opportunity, though it's a tight schedule during the regular season, to experience a little bit of México City, do some additional things in the community. They're both thrilled to be part of this NBA México effort.

At the same time, they know they're here to play a regular-season game. For those here who don't necessarily regularly get to see live NBA basketball, we're anticipating a great game.

I should point out that it so happens that with Coach Popovich, Coach Spo, you have two of the top-15 coaches in our history, which were named as part of our 75th Anniversary Team.

Lastly, let me thank our partner Zignia Live. We also celebrated the 10-year mark of that partnership relationship here. They are our partner in producing the game here in this arena, and we look forward to doing many more games in the future with them.

I'll just say, with that, happy to answer any questions anyone has for me today.

Q. What work does México City have to do to be considered maybe in the future for the expansion of the NBA? And how are the negotiations in this moment between the players and the NBA?

ADAM SILVER: I'll take your second question first. Conversations are ongoing with the Players Association concerning a new collective bargaining agreement. We have a terrific relationship with our Players Association. I know there are things that both sides want to address.



There is a relatively new executive director, Tamika Tremaglio, at the Players Association, and we're building our own relationship.

But I anticipate we'll have productive conversations continuing into the spring, and at the end of the day, we know we're going to continue building on that wonderful partnership.

In terms of México City, I believe you're doing all the things necessary to demonstrate to the league that ultimately we may be in a position to house an NBA team here. Certainly from a travel standpoint it's very accessible, time zone wise, of course, climate. México City is the largest city in North America. Incredible population of 120 million people [in México] who love sport. At least our numbers show that there are 30 million people right now in México that identify themselves as NBA fans, and we believe through all new forms of media that are available to us, that number will only continue to grow.

Q. Commissioner, speaking of which, about the possible expansion of the league in México, is it a reality, because yesterday Mark Tatum said that maybe Las Vegas, Seattle or Ciudad de México were considered, then coaches said it could be possible, then players said it should be amazing to have an NBA franchise in México. Is it possible like in the near future?

ADAM SILVER: It's definitely possible. Deputy Commissioner Tatum is here in the front row. I saw his comments yesterday. I think what Mark has been saying is that while expansion is not on the front burner for the league right now -- to the prior question, we want to get a new collective bargaining agreement, our media deals are up soon, so we need to renew those, as well, but then we will turn to expansion.

As I've said in the past, it's, I feel, our manifest destiny to continue to grow and not just grow in the United States but grow outside the United States, as well. When you look at the success we've had in Canada to the north, beginning in the early '90s, it makes sense to me that we would expand to the south, as well. As I've said, our 31st game here, a very accessible market. We're going to stay at it.

I don't have a specific timeline right now in terms of expansion, but there's no doubt we will be looking seriously at México City over time.

Q. This past week the NBA released the new designs of the trophies, and beginning in 2023 the Most Valuable Player trophy will be named after Michael Jordan. Can you tell us about that decision for the

greatest player ever?

ADAM SILVER: Absolutely. Let me begin by saying of course Michael Jordan is now a governor in this league, of the Charlotte Hornets, one of my 30 bosses right now. I want to make clear he was not looking for an additional honor and he had to be, frankly, persuaded to accept this.

It was the feeling, though, as we worked through the 75th anniversary and in discussions with our players and our Players Association, that there was even more we could do as a league to honor the great players of the past.

I think when we were looking then to add a name and association, a new one, to the MVP trophy, I think for everyone, they said, who better than Michael Jordan?

As you know, then there was honors for Jerry West, Clutch Player, Hakeem Olajuwon, Defensive Player, et cetera. It goes down the list.

I think it's important for the league that we constantly celebrate the past. Part of it is for the young players coming to this league and winning trophies, that those [former] players aren't forgotten, and that the values they brought to the game, the way they helped build the game to what it is today, continue to be remembered. So we thought through those trophies, that was a perfect way to do it.

Q. How do you see the future of the NBA related with technology? We are talking about internet, VR, ER, gaming, streaming. How do you see the future using these technologies, and what are the plans for the NBA related to that?

ADAM SILVER: When it comes to live sports, not just basketball and the NBA but for all sports, so much of our future will be directly tied to the innovation that is coming through new technologies.

When I think about even just the transformation in the 30 years that I've been involved in the league, the fact now that we carry these smartphones in our pockets that have clarity better than what televisions were when I joined the league, the fact that you can be essentially anywhere in the world now and be watching NBA content, the fact that it can be personalized, customized and then it goes to your question, creating gaming opportunities around it, merchandising opportunities, social media communities around the games.

To me, and I speak on behalf of all sports, not just basketball or the NBA, I think some of the best community in the world is created through these live opportunities.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I'm also a big soccer fan. It's amazing to me to watch the coverage of the World Cup to see the whole world come together through that event. The fact that I can be in New York City where I live and be -- sometimes the time zones aren't convenient, but I can be anywhere on my phone watching those games, and you're hearing people cheering from other offices who you know are watching it, as well.

It just opens more and more doors, I think, for live sports, and more opportunity to tie the world together.

There are lots of ways that divide us, and we all know those many difficult issues that we have to work through on a global basis. But live sports, on the other hand, is one of those things that definitely brings us together. We're seeing that through the World Cup right now.

Q. Now you see the prototype of Mexican players like Horacio Llamas, Eduardo Nájera. What do you think about the prototype of the basketball player from México, what they need to get into the NBA for the future?

ADAM SILVER: It's something we're very focused on. That is, on building a pipeline of young boys and girls, in the case of the WNBA, who will find passion in the sport of basketball, have access to great instruction and resources, and then to be able to dream about becoming one of the best in the world and playing in the NBA or the WNBA.

As I said earlier, there are no shortcuts to that process. Part of it is through our grassroots efforts. We know in terms of influencing young people, one of the reasons to have these games on the ground is the kind of coverage that we get.

Thank you again to all the people in the room. I think that proximity, I think the media exposure that we get from it -- heroes can come from everywhere. There's no question about it.

We see that in soccer. To be a fan of Messi or Mbappe, you don't have to be from their countries, but you can still be inspired by that incredible talent. But having someone who is from your country that you see maybe came up through similar circumstances that you are makes a big difference.

Through our academy program here, through Jr. NBA, we're just going to continue to put resources behind it. It's a bit of a numbers game. We know if we can get lots of young people to play our sport and many of them are the best athletes, they will develop into great basketball players.

Q. After the Kyrie incident with the social media, what is the position from the NBA about what players say and post in their social media?

ADAM SILVER: Our position is that of course our citizens, when it comes to larger issues in society or issues impacting the league for that matter, have this enormous platform, whether it's through social media or directly through the media at press conferences like this, but they have to do it responsibly, and there are going to be guardrails that the league puts in place.

In the case of Kyrie Irving, he crossed that line. He came to understand that he did cross that line and paid a fairly harsh penalty for having done so. I think that is important, that everybody understands for this league that we're going to stand by our values. There's nothing inconsistent, to me, with encouraging players to speak out on one hand but also at the same time reminding them that there are lines that we don't cross, particularly around hate speech.

Q. Is there a plan to go back to two regular-season games here in '23 or even more regular-season games in the coming years?

ADAM SILVER: We don't have a specific plan, but it's something we're actively looking at. We have in the past, to your point, in some cases even played three games over the course of a calendar year.

Part of it is just working through the schedule and making sure that there's appropriate rest built in for the players. But I would say, even as I was talking before about the impact of people and the fans in México City and México being here, it also has an impact on the people from the league office.

There are a lot of us down here. I think when we're here on the ground, when we see the enthusiasm, meet with our partners down here, I would say even as I sit and talk to my colleagues like Mark Tatum, who is here with me, the reaction is, Hmm, we should try to play more than one game here. This is an incredible market. It's very accessible to the United States. We have a huge fan base here.

I'm also looking at my colleagues here from Latin America and México: What more can we do here? So that is something we'll be talking about.

Q. You talked about the growth of the league. We are witnesses of that. I want to ask you about the WNBA, how to improve the growth of the female league of the NBA, probably games outside the USA, exhibition

games or regular-season games, or if you are planning any expansion of the league.

ADAM SILVER: In terms of the WNBA and the development of girls and women basketball players, it's not a different blueprint from what I talked about on the men's side. We'd love to see WNBA preseason, exhibition games, regular-season games here, as well. I think that is a model we're still building out.

Right now, they have a shorter season. It's of course a younger league. They're still, I'd say, in a development stage that the NBA is not in. The NBA is more of a mature league.

But I know I speak for Cathy Engelbert, the commissioner of the WNBA: International growth of women's basketball is something that she's very focused on, as well.

Q. Is it possible to do an All-Star Game here in México? It's been already done once outside the United States, in Toronto.

ADAM SILVER: It's certainly possible. I would only say, just to be really direct, our current NBA markets are competing very hard to get All-Star Games. Of course, the other game you referenced, in Toronto, we have an NBA franchise there.

It's something we're going to continue to look at. I don't think it's going to come in the near term, but over time there's no question that México City could host a spectacular All-Star week, which is really what it is now.

Not in the near term, but it's something we will look at for the future.

Q. I wanted to ask you, how is the election process for the teams to come to México? Also, if it is already a fact, if the NBA is coming back next year, and how close would it be to see Los Angeles Lakers and LeBron James here in México?

ADAM SILVER: I can't comment yet specifically on the teams that may come here next year because we haven't worked through that. I will say, though, that over the course of the 30 years we've been playing in México City, 22 different NBA clubs have played here. We do want to bring a diverse group of teams and continue to mix it up and expose the fans here to many organizations.

I hear you, though, about the Lakers, so we'll look at that, as well.

Q. A psychologist who sued the Spurs settled her

lawsuit against the team recently, alleging that Josh Primo had exposed himself to her in private therapy sessions. Did the league conduct its own investigation into what happened, and what safeguards can be put in place to prevent future incidents?

ADAM SILVER: The league worked in conjunction with the Spurs on that particular case. I think most importantly, and one of the things we're constantly learning, is that as a league we have to ensure that for 30 teams that every team is living up to a set of values that are promulgated as part of this league.

I think what we're seeing in society, that there are constantly new areas where we're appropriately being held accountable. I think the San Antonio Spurs, as I understand it, handled the situation in a very responsible way. But I think as a league and with our 30 teams, the goal, of course, is to prevent these situations from ever happening. That goes to training and appropriate safeguards to put in place. We continue to learn from each other and also learn from outside our league, not just from other sports organizations but from other industries what the best practices are going forward. That is something we're very focused on.

Q. Building off of that, there were a couple other incidents with the Celtics and I believe also the Detroit Pistons about inappropriate contact between employees. How did the league handle situations like that? Are there plans in place to try to add on, increase those, as you describe them, safety guardrails?

ADAM SILVER: I think, again, I don't want to ever stand here and claim we're never going to have incidents when you have thousands and thousands of employees across 30 teams. But to the point of the prior question, I think it is the responsibility of the league, working with our teams, to ensure we have appropriate training, safeguards, best practices in place, and that when there is an incident that we all deal with it in the appropriate way.

All I can say is that is something we continue to talk to our teams about. We bring in outside experts. We share best practices with each other. I think it's something that we're far from perfect, but we continue to improve every year.

Q. Recently the NBA changed the brand of the basketball. What has been the reaction of the players? Do they play they play better, and which was the main factor about the change besides the business?

ADAM SILVER: Well, the change, frankly, was a



commercial one initially from Spalding, a longtime partner, to Wilson, but Wilson had been our partner before Spalding and had the official ball. So in a way, it had gone full circle.

The response from the players has been very positive. We had a group of players who worked together with the league office who sampled many different balls, gave feedback all along the way on the quality of the leather, on the precise way it's manufactured and where the binding is and where the logos are.

We made a few modifications early on based on the feedback. But I think the best news is no one is talking about it right now. One thing, putting aside, there's a bit of a psychological issue, I think, when the change is made. But we can tell from the shooting statistics -- in fact, having experienced the highest-scoring games in decades right now, that certainly players are doing a great job of handling these balls. So we're pleased with the transition.

Q. Coming back to the topic of expansion, you mentioned that México has the venue, the population, the market, et cetera, but maybe there are some specifications México has to have to host an NBA franchise. Could you speak of that a bit, please?

ADAM SILVER: It would be tough to give you too specific a list right now because we're not at that point. I think if we were in expansion mode, we would have a committee of governors at the NBA who would come together who would create more specific criteria. It's sort of built into your question, though, that there's no doubt that in terms of the fundamentals, the market size, the beautiful state-of-the-art arena, quality hotels and entertainment and restaurants and fervent fan support, that all exists here in México City.

I think there are additional issues. Some of them we had to work through in Canada. When you're playing outside of your home country, just from a regulatory standpoint, same issues we deal with in trade, so those might be some unique circumstances we need to deal with in México City.

But other than that, I think part of it is a business analysis of how it would work in terms of building on the fan base we already have.

I'll add one factor that I wouldn't have thought of even when I was here in 2019. We're seeing a faster transformation to streaming than I would have predicted even a few years ago, and when you move to streaming platforms and you're talking to these partners that are very much global, I think the addition of a team, for example, in México, might have a very different impact and relevance to them than maybe a historical U.S.-based media partner.

Clearly the opportunity to reach more people -- I think I see being in México City, not just, of course, for México, but as a gateway to all of Latin America and the opportunity to kind of flip a switch a little bit in terms of opening up a large geographical area to NBA interest. That would be a factor that we would think very seriously about.

Q. You have done amazing work in the globalization of the league, not just talking about the games but also talking about the level of international players. What do you think about, because now an international team would beat a U.S. team. What do you think about it?

ADAM SILVER: You know, part of it is that right now roughly 25 percent of the league was born outside of the United States. So part of it, in fairness to the players, like if we were to do sort of an All-Star format or something like that, I wouldn't necessarily want one pool to come from 25 percent of players and the other pool come from 75 percent. But again, look no further than the World Cup. There's no doubt that nationalistic fervor that you see when you're playing for your country is second to none. I mean, it's something we all can connect to.

As you said as part of your question, when you look at the international growth of the NBA, it's not just that 25 percent of our players. But if you look at our two last MVPs. Somebody mentioned to me earlier today, the top-five scorers in the NBA are from five different countries. U.S. represents one of those in Jayson Tatum, but then four other countries, and we know who those players are.

We're seeing that growth. I'm sorry David Stern isn't with us. Sort of it was his vision to truly make the NBA and basketball a global sport. I began at the league in 1992, shortly before the Barcelona Olympics and the Dream Team. We saw the impact that had. Now looking back 30 years, 30 years of playing games in México City, it's really happening.

I just think that for my colleagues here and for me, we just have to stick with it. We have to continue to recognize this is an incremental process. But then all of a sudden you'll see a jump. For example, we saw with Yao Ming in China, where all of a sudden you have a once-in-a-lifetime transformational player come from a market. That can also have a big impact. But the only way you can take advantage of that is if you've laid the groundwork and put in all the thousands of hours it takes, brought that game to the market in a grassroots way and then to be ready for it.

I think that's what we're going to continue to see with this sport. It's only going to continue to grow on a global basis, which is what makes this so exciting for me and for all our fans.

Just want to thank you all again today very much. Looking forward to the game this afternoon. Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

