

Paris Game: Bulls vs. Pistons

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Accor Arena

Commissioner Adam Silver

Press Conference

ADAM SILVER: It's fantastic to be back here in Paris. Of course, the last time we were here is roughly this time of year in 2020, and we all know what happened after that. I actually remember when we were here then, that January in 2020, we started to see people wearing masks. People knew something was coming. No one was predicting at that time that the world was going to shut down and we'd go on to play in a bubble, et cetera.

Our hope is, of course, that we've bookended that pandemic, and the worst is behind us. We hope it is. Here we are today. We don't see a lot of masks, and Paris is the vibrant city it was back then. That's fantastic news.

I want to thank the Pistons and the Bulls organization for being here and being so tremendously cooperative. One of the teams is staying in my hotel, and it's wonderful to see so many family members who have made the trip with them. It's a little midseason break for some and falls at a good time of the year. But I know everybody is just thrilled to be here. Thank you, all members of the media, for being here.

Speaking of the Bulls, and as I look around the room, many of you were also covering the league or part of the league 25 years ago when the Bulls were here as part of the McDonald's Championship. It was two preseason games. That would have been 1997, so roughly 25 years ago. I hope many of you saw "The Last Dance," the documentary, that was then made around that season. It's still available on Netflix, if you haven't seen it.

But I know personally, I have great memories being there then with that great Bulls team. I remember Ahmad Rashad was here. I remember Ahmad, when we sat with Phil Jackson on that trip, and I was with NBA Entertainment back then, we asked his permission to let us have our camera crews. They used camera folks in the back. They were shooting film in those days. Got permission to be a fly on the wall for when the season began for that team, and of course culminated in a championship. Paris is part of the DNA of that team and of



the league.

Speaking also of sort of that 25-year-ago period compared to now, credit to Axios Sports and Kendall Baker, who I ran into at a reception last night. He wrote this today so I'm stealing it from him, but I did check, Kendall, and your numbers are right, that 25 years ago, approximately 7 percent of the players in the NBA were born outside the United States. There were 29 players.

Jump ahead to today, we have 120 players outside of the roughly still 450, representing nearly a third of the league, again, who were born outside the United States. So pretty dramatic growth in the global game over the last 25 years.

Currently this season, four out of our top five highest scorers are international players, and of course the last four MVP trophies have been presented to international players. We're really seeing the ongoing continued growth of this league. I know David Stern, who unfortunately is no longer with us, but it was so much of his vision to turn this into the global game it's become today. If he's looking down on us, I know he'd be incredibly proud of those numbers.

Yesterday my colleagues and I had the opportunity to meet with President Macron and talk a bit about the influence of sport on French culture, and basketball in particular. Coming out of that meeting, we've announced the beginning of a partnership, working directly with the French Federation and league, to further develop the commercialization of sports here and also to use sport, both here in France and in Africa, where the African Development Agency is doing a lot of work and so is the NBA, to use sport to bring people together, to represent the important values of sport, teaching young people about discipline and respect and working as teams.

We're very proud of that. Again, it's a unique moment, I think, in French basketball, too, because there's this player, who I haven't met yet, but who is rumored to be the first pick in the draft this year, and I hear he's going to be here tonight, so it'll be the first time I get to shake his hand.

On top of that, of course we have the Paris Olympics



coming the summer after this one. As part of the Summer Olympics, basketball is one of the top-attended sports. Because attendance obviously was limited in Japan, many people didn't get an opportunity to see what is a new Olympic sport, which is 3-on-3 basketball, which is outdoor basketball. So you're going to see two different basketball venues which the Olympics come here in Paris.

That's also enormously exciting. I think it gives us the opportunity to work with President Macron and his ministers to continue developing the sport leading up to that showcase around the Paris Olympics.

I'll just conclude by saying thank you again to all my colleagues at the NBA for helping host this game, to the Bulls and the Pistons. Looking forward to a great matchup tonight. I know the players, for them and I think this community, it's not -- don't want to quite compare this to All-Star, but it's the closest thing to a European All-Star Game that we have. Again, as I look around the room, meetings I've had in the last few days, because this is a date people can mark on their calendars and know that we'll be here, for many of our business partners, many of the basketball leaders from around the world, federation representatives use this as a gathering place to come together around the game. It's given us an opportunity to have clinics of sorts for youth, for French youth. I think we've impacted roughly (1,000) young people just in the last few days here, but also celebrations and parties.

Just as I was talking about the bookending of the pandemic, many of us had only seen each other through some form of virtual or Zoom media over the last few years, so it's been terrific to just get to see some old friends in person over the last few days.

With that, happy to answer any questions.

Q. You were talking about the Olympics, and one of the hot topics the year past in France has been the fact that during the Paris Olympics, the first week of basketball won't be played exactly in Paris but in Lille. So there were security questions that were raised, risk of injury for players maybe, air conditioning, a lot of stuff, the transfers the U.S. players would have to do. I wanted to know if you talked about this with President Macron and if the league is okay with this, if the players are okay with that right now?

ADAM SILVER: We did raise that topic of the group stage being conducted in Lille, and he assured us everything would be okay.

Q. Now the league is back in Europe after three years, and there are games in Japan and Abu Dhabi and

Mexico. What are the league's plans for the European market? Is the NBA considering like a week when like the NFL did here in Europe or Mexico games with different teams?

ADAM SILVER: It's a good question. A lot of our plans were put on the back burner because of the pandemic. I think getting back out in the market is giving us an opportunity to sit with our colleagues in Europe and formulate new plans.

You know, the head of our Players Association, she's relatively new, Tamika Tremaglio, is here. It's great that she's seeing firsthand the opportunity presented itself here in Paris but more generally in Europe. We're looking for new opportunities.

One of the advantages now compared to 25 years ago of having so many international players, we have nine French players right now in the NBA, is the players are much more enthusiastic about travel. The coaches are more enthusiastic than they used to be.

We're looking at what the best way is, especially during a pretty intense, concentrated season, to travel and represent ourselves internationally. So I'm sure we are going to do more. One of the things we will talk about is in our collective bargaining cycle with our players, as well, is sort of all the various rules around teams traveling.

Stay tuned. We don't have any specific plans right now other than one thing we learned the hard way in the pandemic, there is no substitute for being places in person, connecting with people. We realize most people experience this by media. But still, it's really important to show up, and this is just yet the latest reminder of that.

Q. Are you planning a trip to Greece? Giannis is one of the best players in the NBA and the base is huge about him. Are you planning a trip to Greece, maybe a regular-season or preseason game?

ADAM SILVER: The answer is Giannis has told me personally several times how important that would be for him (laughter), and I know the Bucks therefore feel the same way, and so we are looking at opportunities to return to Greece.

Again, I've been with the league for a long time. We've had many terrific outings in Athens, many other visits. Thank you for being here. It's a very strong basketball market.

Now that sort of the world is back and people are traveling again, we will be looking at opportunities in Greece and



other European markets.

Q. My question is about LeBron James, obviously very close to all-time scoring record. Is there anything you can tell us about any plans the league might have to honor him at this stage? Secondly, would the league possibly look at doing that game on national TV if it does happen to fall on a local TV night?

ADAM SILVER: Yes, we would look at making sure that game isn't just national in the United States but globally available if he's anywhere within a reasonable amount of points of breaking that record. We will do that.

In terms of specific plans, there's no doubt we will stop that game and make sure we record for history, the ball, the basket, the uniform. We'll stop and make sure that we've done our jobs as the archivists of the NBA. At the same time, there's that balance that they will be playing against a team that will very much want to win that night and not be distracted. Most likely we will do something in the moment, but then we will plan a larger celebration.

Interestingly enough, calculating out when it might happen, it seems at this point it's likely to happen before our All-Star break. If it were to happen before our All-Star break, it seems like the All-Star Game this year, which is in Salt Lake City, may be the perfect opportunity to honor him.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your meeting, to expand on the meeting with President Macron. Just from a timing standpoint, how important was it -- one, you're back here; two, we're going to spend a lot of time here next year, obviously. Do you know what the plan is for next year, and also because of the unknown named French prospect, how important is the timing on that front, and did he raise any concerns on that front?

ADAM SILVER: President Macron certainly raised no concerns. It was a very upbeat meeting. In fact, he mentioned, as we all know, there's a national strike today in France. We were hoping at least on his busy schedule for yesterday, it was one of the easier meetings that he had and about only positive things around sport and the NBA.

We did tell him, and we discussed the fact that it's highly likely, independent from the Olympics, that we will be back in Paris again next year for another regular-season game. We haven't locked in those plans yet or the teams, but we anticipate that will happen.

In response to the prior question, we did talk about Lille. We did raise that as a potential issue, but he said he's very focused on it and we should not worry.

Then we talked generally about just the culture of sport here in France and his belief, I think, very similar certainly to the NBA's, about the power of sport to bring people together. What a constructive force it can be, and even as a global engine to create commonality and empathy among people.

It so happened that President Macron was visiting Rwanda during our first season of our Basketball Africa League. He was in Kigali for one of our first playoff games of the BAL, and President Paul Kagame attended that game together.

He was very familiar with our global plans in Africa in particular. He talked a little bit about what the African developmental agency is doing in Africa, and again, we talked about things that we can do together. At least from our standpoint, it was a very upbeat meeting.

Lastly, we talked a bit about the Olympics and in essence sort of the partnership in that L.A. will be the Summer Olympics following Paris. And again, just really there as a representative of the United States talking about how wonderful an experience we believe this will be in Paris, and then maybe what we can learn from it for L.A., as well.

Q. There's some discussions about the recent scoring outburst in the NBA, and some people say maybe we should look at the rules and give the defense maybe some new tools to fight better, fight harder against it. What is your standpoint on that?

ADAM SILVER: I love the "some people say" questions. I'm looking at Joe Dumars and Byron Spruell, our head of basketball administration, our head of basketball operations, who are sitting in the front row. I hope you guys were listening to that question.

We pay a lot of attention to that. For me, a fan, the talent level is just off the charts, and that has a lot to do with what we're seeing. Of course, the enormous increase in three-point shooting is going to lead to more scoring, too, especially when these guys, even the big men, shoot three-point shots as well as they do.

I don't think it's necessarily a case that defense is not being focused on as it once was. I've been around the league long enough to remember when the claim was guys played no defense at all, and so there's a fair amount of defense played.

But I would say in the league, sometimes this distinguishes us from other leagues. We're not traditionalists in that we're afraid to make changes. We are constantly reassessing. That's what Joe Dumars and Byron Spruell's jobs are, together with our Competition Committee. We'll

continue to look at it.

I think the fans are telling us, and responding with record ratings, that the game is exciting as ever. But we're not afraid to reexamine it. Generally, we don't make rule changes mid-course or during a season. But we sit down at the end of the season, we look at all the data, and we'll assess it.

But it's interesting. As I mentioned at the top of the press conference, four of the top five scorers are international players, and these great shooters are coming from everywhere now.

We want a multifaceted game. I hear some of the criticism of we want it to be all three-point shooting. For those who have been covering the league for a long time, I remember people were saying it's all about dunking and guys can't shoot. Now it's they shoot too well, it should be more of an inside game. We'll keep looking at it.

Lastly, what always comes up when we're having basketball meetings outside of the United States is more that we can do with our federation, with FIBA, to create common rules around the world. I mean, they're essentially the same rules. But I think that's also something that we can do a better job on, making it completely uniform, so whether you're picking up a ball in Paris or New York or Mumbai, it's the exact same game.

All those things relate to an ongoing examination of how to improve the game.

Q. We must mention Nikola Jokic here in Europe. Last year everyone enjoyed the MVP ceremony. Can we maybe expect you to come to Serbia to his hometown and enjoy Serbia?

ADAM SILVER: He hasn't invited me yet, and I've never been, but I would love to come. He is a fantastic player in every way. I think when you think from the league standpoint, in addition to exceeding all expectations just based on where he was drafted, of course, for all good young players listening, that just goes to show that's one marker of quality of player, the fact that he came from the second round to be the player that he is.

But in addition he plays with incredible joy. Maybe a little bit to the prior question, too, he brings his own unique style and scoring ability to this game. I don't think it's that players aren't playing defense on Jokic. He's just an incredible, fantastic, once-in-a-generation talent. As I said, I think it's a pleasure to have him in the league, and I thank you for being here as his representative.

Q. The past few years haven't been the easiest to deal with in terms of navigating through crises or hot topics, controversies. Do you feel like the NBA got stronger through these challenges?

ADAM SILVER: When I think back on the last few years, it's a bit of a blur in thinking about that bookending of the pandemic and a lot else that the league has dealt with. I think maybe it's a reflection on the world in many ways, how social media works, how controversies that we have in the world, how small issues can blow up very quickly. It certainly keeps us all on our toes.

At the same time, I think it has made us stronger. I think when at least our belief is that if we can deal directly with issues, speak frankly to them, be transparent, accept criticism, change when we think the criticism is valid, it will make us a better league. I think even, looking at Chrysa Chin from the NBA Players Association who is here, I think it brought us closer to the players, having experienced the pandemic together. We wouldn't have gotten through it. There was no blueprint for that. It was certainly outside of any agreement that we had in place.

Michele Roberts was then the executive director of the Players Association and Chris Paul was the president. We had to meet constantly and work out exactly what it would mean to play in a so-called bubble. We did the same thing with the WNBA, by the way. I think it brought us incredibly close because it taught us that everybody had a common interest. At the same time there were differences of opinion, there was tension at times. But we worked through them, largely by compromising in certain cases.

We dealt with social unrest at the same time in the United States. I thought we all came together on those issues, as well.

Incidentally, I should say for our business partners, there was a period we didn't have games on. Then there was a period where the games were not only coming from a bubble without fans but we had to shift the Finals and Playoffs to a different time of the year. Part of building relationships over many years is being able to go to those partners and say, let's leave those contracts in the drawer, let's just figure out what's fair and work through these issues.

In the end, when you go through that, I think it does bring you closer to your partners, to your friends. You learn who are your true partners who are in it for the long term with you. Many of those same partners came to us and said, we owe you check on this date, but it's very difficult, our business has been shut down for some period of time. And we worked with them.

It's a great question. I think at the end, it's brought us much stronger, I think, to our fans, to our partners, to our players. And hopefully over time we'll have learned from that experience and it will make us a better league.

Q. You touched on LeBron and breaking the scoring record. I'm just curious from your perspective because of your knowledge, and you've been around a while, the significance of breaking a potentially scoring record of someone of such caliber to the league, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and I was wondering if you could speak on that.

ADAM SILVER: Sure. And again, let's let it happen before we start reflecting on it. I think you want to let events sort of unfold.

But I will say, just the physical endurance itself, to play that many years. I know I'm a lot older than LeBron. But all the travel -- I think about the wear and tear on his body and the lack of sleep and the three and a half games a week, season after season, how he takes care of himself.

I hope the young players pay attention to that. Anyone who's ever been around LeBron, he's always working on his body. He's always thinking about getting his sleep and proper nutrition. It's hard to talk to him where he doesn't have some device hooked up to him or ice on some part of his body where he's constantly recuperating from the bangs and the minor injuries he's constantly dealing with. So there's that in itself, just the endurance. But then of course the physical and mental skill that it takes to power through that many seasons, to continue performing at an incredibly high level night after night after night.

I'm sure many of you people in this room think of it the same way I do. There are many days where we go to work and might have had a terrible night's sleep or difficult something happened at home. You maybe don't have to -- nobody is watching you. You kind of make it through the day. You just think, I can't wait until I get home that night or I can go back to sleep. Think about it from an NBA player's standpoint or any professional athlete, where millions of people are watching their performance, everything is recorded for posterity.

So to do that at the highest level game after game, and then to be in a position to break one of the all-time records of most points ever scored, it's quite remarkable. I think it's such a testament to him. And he's not just sort of at the end of his career just like hanging around to get that record. He's still playing at an incredibly high level.

I think it's spectacular. I hope fans are paying a lot of

attention to what's happening right now. We mentioned Michael Jordan before. I remember thinking, I was with the league, of course, near the end of his career. You wanted to just shake some people and say, make sure you watch this guy. Players like this don't come along ever -- once a generation or so -- and make sure you get a chance to see him when he's still playing at a high level. So I hope people think about it when it comes to LeBron.

Q. You mentioned common rules earlier. My question is projected to another level. Europe, maybe the Overtime endeavors, the G League Ignite team, NIL deals. Has the league thought about maybe dropping the age restriction?

ADAM SILVER: We have, and I've talked about it before. I've said on previous occasions, when I first became commissioner in 2014, I actually thought minimum age is 19, we should raise it, given some of the developmental issues around our players.

I think then as time went on and college basketball began to change for various reasons and now including NIL deals and other issues in the U.S., and also the NCAA put together a commission led by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. She then formally came to the league and the Players Association. Remember, we can only make a change jointly by agreement. She said, on behalf of college basketball, we believe the sport of basketball and college basketball will be better off if you change the minimum age to 18 from 19.

So ultimately I think it's a close call. But we, the NBA, have proposed to our Players Association that we lower the age from 19 to 18. I'll let them speak for themselves, but that's on the table in collective bargaining right now.

On balance, I've come to think that's the right approach. Interestingly, we were talking about the international players before, a very different development system outside of the United States. But when I've had the opportunity to meet with some of the players we were referencing before, some of the truly great international players, they chuckle when we're talking about 19 versus 18 because many of them were professionals when they were 14. It's just a very different system.

I'm at the point where I think that it's perfectly appropriate for young talent, and we see this, of course, in European soccer, to be participating in academies and other programs where they're also getting education. But there's a recognition that these young folks have extraordinary opportunity and that they should be focused in a very singular way on their potential to become professionals at a very high level. That's why I think, although there's

negatives to it, too, I think we'd be better off going to 18 at this point.

Q. You brought up the collective bargaining agreement, and I was wondering if you have an update on those negotiations?

ADAM SILVER: Not really. We have an understanding where our Players Association that we don't negotiate in public. I'll only say that we're continuing to negotiate with our players, although, as I mentioned before, Tamika Tremaglio, the executive director of the union, and I are both over here in Paris. Our colleagues are back in New York negotiating as we speak. They've been meeting all week. It's going issue by issue, trying to work through those issues that separate us.

I will say, though, I think we start from a very strong foundation. I mean, back to the earlier question about do some of these difficulties bring you closer, they have. I think there's a strong sense of partnership between the players and the league. Again, it doesn't mean we don't have disagreements. But I'm hopeful, in the same spirit of the conversation we had with President Macron earlier, that people that disagree find ways to compromise and move forward and make this league even better.

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