

Mexico City Game: Hawks vs Magic

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Mexico City, Mexico

Arena CDMX

Commissioner Adam Silver

Global Games Press Conference

ADAM SILVER: Thank you all for being here. We're thrilled to be back here in Mexico City for our 32nd game in essentially the last 30 years in Mexico. Of course, this is a regular-season game. We're thrilled the Atlanta Hawks and of course Orlando Magic could be here for this game. They're ready to play.

It's exciting for them to be in a different venue. The teams got here on Tuesday. They've had the opportunity to spend some time in the city the last few days, do some cultural things, be part of a clinic for kids, and of course practice and get ready for the game.

We have a sold-out crowd here tonight, and I want to thank our fans in Mexico City and in Mexico. Of course, we have a G-League team now, Capitanes. This is essentially the third season they've been playing in Mexico City. We got kind of a half a season start during the pandemic, but we think there's enormous opportunity to continue growing the game of basketball here in Mexico City and throughout the country, and we also see this as a gateway essentially to the rest of Latin America.

We're seeing all of the indicators are positive in terms of playing, social media, viewership in terms of the growth of the game. We think, whether it be additional G League franchises in Mexico City and ultimately a larger footprint here in Latin America or ultimately the dream of an NBA franchise coming to Mexico City one day, something we've been -- my predecessor David Stern talked about many years ago.

It's something that -- a dream we've never forgotten and something given the population and the enormous interest here and of course this first-class arena, something we'd love to see happen one day, as well.

With that, I'm happy to answer any questions.

Q. I know it's not time to talk about the NBA expansion process, but in your opinion does Mexico have a chance in this process in the future because there are



a lot of cities.

ADAM SILVER: Well, as I mentioned in my introductory remarks, it goes back actually many years when I was working for David Stern even before I was the Deputy Commissioner, that he talked about the opportunity potentially here in Mexico City. Of course, it's the largest city in North America, a vibrant and growing economy, a destination increasingly for people from the United States to come for the culture, the museums, the fine food, beautiful hotels.

I flew here today from New York. Of course, it's a shorter flight than if I were flying to Los Angeles. It's very doable. There are issues we'd need to work through, of course, and we're not in expansion mode at the moment, but over time organizations grow, and I think the opportunity to extend our footprint not just into Mexico City and all the positive attributes I said, but also again just as a gateway into all of Central and Latin America is a huge opportunity with a growing game. It's something we'll continue to focus on.

Q. In terms of globalization, how far is the NBA, just to think about an All-Star Game, American players against the rest of the world?

ADAM SILVER: It's something we're thinking about. So this year of course the All-Star Game is in Indianapolis. The state of Indiana, it makes me think of bringing, focusing back on the essentials of basketball. I think that's what that state is known for, which is one of the reasons that we've decided to return to our traditional format.

Of course, it's still East versus West, but not have the unique so-called Elam Ending at the end, four 12-minute quarters, and also in discussion with the players, something we've been talking to them a lot about, bringing back a competitive game.

That's where we start this year.

But to your point over time, looking at the U.S. against the world, I think for the champions in Germany, for example, they might say, that's not fair; we don't need the whole

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world; we won the World Cup. But we're looking for ways to make it more competitive.

One of the things we have to think about in terms of if it were to be that format, the U.S. against other countries, that still, if you add up all the international players in our league, it's still less than a third of the players. So we'd have to figure out how to make sure it was fair for all the players in terms of how they're selected as All-Stars because it's very meaningful for them, it's meaningful for their contracts, it's meaningful prestige. They want to play in the game. But that's not insurmountable. We could work through that.

I'm a golf fan. I think the Ryder Cup type format is incredibly interesting and competitive. Probably we would need to put our own twist on it.

But again, it's something we're looking at. We're very much a global league. As I said, even though it's less than a third, the players were born outside the United States, that percentage is growing. Our last five MVPs were made up of three different players, of course, all international players. Our first pick in the Draft, Victor Wembanyama, of course is from France.

So we're seeing, as I've mentioned earlier about David Stern, my predecessor, this was also a part of his dream was, he worked at the league for many years to continue growing the game globally and we're seeing that.

As we can see that interest continue to grow, I think we have to be more innovative and look for ways to create more fan interest. Finding ways to make things like All-Star more competitive would go a long way.

Q. Do you consider Latin America needs like a kind of an NBA Americas League to motivate the production of players with NBA projection, particularly Mexicans?

ADAM SILVER: Well, we do want to develop more players in Mexico. There's no question about that. We have an Academy here in Mexico. That will not yield success overnight. You have to develop players and then those players need to compete against other great players. It's a process of course to develop more great Mexican players.

I think having this G League team here, Capitanes, here in Mexico City goes a long way. It makes more games available. It creates more heroes for young people to aspire towards, and as I said earlier, I think over time we could see having more G League teams in the region, maybe not just even in Mexico but creating more teams in Central and Latin America for more competition, and then even earlier, as I said before, if we were to have one day

an NBA team here in Mexico City, there's no doubt that would create even more interest and inspire more young people to play the game of basketball.

Q. I was wondering if you could talk to us a little bit about what the elevation of Andre Iguodala to acting head of the Players Association means for the league moving forward?

ADAM SILVER: I don't know what it will mean long-term. I've known Andre for a long time. Of course, he was a championship NBA player. He had a very long and successful NBA career. He was on the Executive Committee for many years of the Players Association.

In addition to a personal relationship with him, I had that more formal relationship sitting across from him at the bargaining table, and he's a very passionate player and a very knowledgeable player.

I don't know any more about the internal workings of the Players Association other than, of course, I will work directly with whoever comes forward over the long-term as the executive director of that Players Association.

We had an excellent working relationship with Tamika Tremaglio. Again, we concluded a successful collective bargaining relationship. Again, I don't know anything more about the internal dynamics, but I look forward to working with Andre.

Q. The Lakers have never played here in Mexico. Does the NBA have a plan that maybe like the NFL that each five, eight years all the teams come play overseas? And next year is the Olympics; the U.S. just lost in the World Cup. Do you see it could be like a big hit for the NBA, big detriment for the NBA if the U.S. does not win gold again?

ADAM SILVER: I believe these two teams now, with the Magic and Hawks here, it means that 23 of the NBA teams will have played in Mexico, and of course over time the goal is for all 30 teams to play in Mexico.

I think when you talked about the NFL plan, you weren't being specific to Mexico City, you were saying for all teams to play internationally.

Absolutely, we rotate around. We play in Asia, we play in Europe, we play here in Mexico City.

The goal is for all teams to sort of share in the experience of traveling, and it's very different than I would say the old days where it took some arm twisting. Today with the league with close to a third of our players, as I said, born

outside of the United States, the teams welcome the international travel. It's a bonding experience for them. I think also to your initial point to me about am I enjoying Mexico City and Mexico, our players very much love it here, too, and the experience they have.

In terms of the Olympic competition, I wear two hats. Of course I'm an American and I root for USA teams, whether it's in basketball or all sports, but again, wearing my NBA commissioner's hat, we will have probably approximately -- I'm looking at Mark Tatum, the Deputy Commissioner, roughly 100 NBA players will participate in the Olympics in Paris, and again, wearing my NBA hat, I'm cheering for all of those players to do well.

I think congratulations again to Germany for winning the Basketball World Cup in the Philippines, but I think it only goes to how competitive the sport has become globally, and over time I think USA Basketball, Grant Hill oversees the Senior Men's basketball, of course his job is to win a gold medal for the United States, but also he realizes and Coach [Steve] Kerr does, as well, that every four years the competition gets that much more difficult because there's many more great players from other countries.

As an American, I root for the USA team, but as the Commissioner of the NBA, I look forward to seeing an incredible competition in Paris.

Q. Last year was San Antonio and Miami, now it's Atlanta and Orlando. What does it take for big stars like LeBron or Steph Curry to make it here to Mexico? Is it a decision that the NBA takes, or is it more a team decision?

ADAM SILVER: It's a combination of league and team, but as I said, we've had 23 of the 30 NBA teams now playing here in Mexico City. I know every player wants the experience of playing in Mexico City.

We have a huge U.S. Hispanic population in the United States, somewhere around 60 million. All of us have relations of people who are Spanish speaking, who have connections to Mexico and Latin America, and I know it's true for those players, as well.

We will get all the teams here over time, and we will evenly distribute the great talent in these regular season and preseason games around the world.

Q. The last two years the NBA made a partnership with a betting house. My question is will there be any moment when players or coaches will be allowed to talk about betting?

ADAM SILVER: Most experience -- my greatest experience around sports betting is from the United States where frankly I was part of a movement to legalize sports betting once internet sports betting became widespread with the view that we're much better off with a regulated, transparent framework.

Our experience has been positive so far. I mean, there are issues that we have to watch out for because more people are openly talking about it than they used to when it was illegal.

But again, I think having it transparent, having us with sophisticated sports betting partners who have complex computers that can monitor betting, monitor aberrant behavior, investigate if something looks unusual, and I would take that experience and we're bringing that now to Mexico and other places.

As you said, we have a new betting partner here. I feel all those same tenets apply to our operation here, as well. We have to monitor everything closely, but I think if not done in excess, it can be an engaging and frankly enjoyable form of entertainment just like other forms of gambling are.

Again, it's going to happen whether or not we are formally partnering with it, and ultimately the conclusion is we're much better off joining with the movement and regulating it and monitoring it.

I do lose sleep over it occasionally because I recognize that there should always be a concern that there could be bad behavior around it, but so far our experience has been a positive one.

Q. Everybody talks about an NBA Mexican team, but what about time? I think in Mexico, NBA have all the crowd, the people, and what about time? How much time do you think to have an NBA here in Mexico, one year, two years, 10?

ADAM SILVER: Well, I don't want to put a specific timeline on it. I'll only say that putting aside Mexico City, we don't expand all that often. It's been many years since our last expansion. I'd say we've been fairly conservative in how we grow the league.

We largely distribute our games through media, and for even most Americans, 90-plus percent of our fans will never step foot in an arena, they'll only watch the game through some form of media, whether more traditionally through a television or increasingly on a mobile device.

I think having said all that, it still is important to plant a flag

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in every market we can. We initially do it by playing preseason games, then we do it with regular-season games.

As I said earlier, there's no market we've been to more than Mexico City with the exception of course of Canada outside the United States. So, we really believe in this market.

Conditions change all the time, and it's something -- one of the reasons it's helpful for me and Deputy Commissioner Mark Tatum to be here in person is to have meetings, to see with our own eyes the passion, to meet here with the media and get a sense of that, and then we go back and talk to our colleagues, we talk to the team owners about the prospects of doing it, of continuing to expand because of course you need the players to want to be our partners here in relocating to Mexico City.

I can't set a specific timeline on it, but a main part of my job, if not the most important part of my job is to grow this league, so it's something I think about a lot.

Q. Today we have a sell-out, last year was also a very big success, Mexico City game. What are the chances for Mexico to host again two or more regular-season games in the short-term, maybe next season?

ADAM SILVER: The chances are very high that we will be back next year with a regular-season game. I don't know yet whether it will be one or two games.

I think frankly our schedule has gotten so complicated because we're trying to avoid as many four games out of five nights as we can, we try to avoid as many back to backs as we can, and then we've created a bit of a scheduling nightmare for the folks, my colleagues in the league office because then we added the In-Season Tournament, and then our Final Four of the In-Season Tournament in Las Vegas.

Purely as a scheduling matter, it becomes more difficult to pull other games out of the regular-season schedule and take them to non-NBA markets.

Having said all that, definitely we'll be back. I moved up from highly likely to definitely. We will be back next year with at least one game, and we'll see whether it's two games.

Q. Could you talk to us about Capitanes? Is the league satisfied? Tomorrow starts a new season for them. How is the league satisfied with that and also with the NBA Academy in Latin America?

ADAM SILVER: The short answer is we're thrilled with both the Academy and the operation of Capitanes here. As you mentioned, Capitanes opens their season in this building tomorrow night. We're expecting a very robust crowd for that game. There's been enormous fan interest throughout the city and country, so much so that we've already begun to think about even expanding the G League to more teams, both in Mexico City and in Latin America.

I think I can't say enough, I remember being in this arena on a stage here talking with the ownership about our dreams for what we could accomplish by starting with the G League here. So all that's very positive, and on the Academy side, again, we recognize we're not going to see success overnight there, but as we increasingly bring these players up year by year, not just train them here through the Academy but then have them travel, face up against other top-notch competition, that's how these players become great.

It's really whet my appetite to do a lot more here and a lot more in the region.

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