

Mexico City Game: Heat vs Wizards

Saturday, November 2, 2024

Mexico City, Mexico

Arena CDMX

Commissioner Adam Silver

Global Games Press Conference

ADAM SILVER: Buenas noches. Thank you all for being here. As many of you know, this is our 33rd NBA game, either preseason or regular season game, here in Mexico City. It's the most games we have played anywhere outside of the United States and Canada, and we've established a great tradition here of basketball.

We believe at least we're the fastest growing sport in Mexico. We know we're the No. 2 sport here behind soccer as we are the No. 2 sport globally, and we're working closely with the community here. We want to thank, of course, our partners here at Zignia Live, who are the hosts of these games in this great arena. It's state-of-the-art. My NBA colleagues and I are in many arenas around the world, and they do a fantastic job here.

Of course we have a G League team here now, Capitanes, and they are really doing well. They had a winning season last year. Their season begins in a week, and they've done just really a fantastic job incorporating themselves into the NBA G League and of course are our only team here in Mexico right now. But we're very excited about that.

Of course, it's Día de Muertos, so I'm not sure if my colleagues planned to be here on this special Day of the Dead, but it's certainly a very celebratory atmosphere. It's fun to see everyone dressed up and celebrating. I know it's also a very serious occasion for people, as well, but it seems very spirited, and it's exciting for us to be part of it, and you will see Día de Muertos celebrations throughout the game. There's a theme that's going on throughout everything we're doing.

Let me add, the team got to town two days ago and have managed to really experience Mexico City, which is very important, I think, for us culturally, as well. In addition, over the past week, we've had several different clinics, clinics for young boys and girls, coaches' clinics, other community events so that people can really get a chance not just to see the game today but to experience the NBA brand and the NBA experience. That's become very important to our festivities here, as well.



It's also exciting that we have Jaime Jaquez here, of course, a player with a Mexican parent who is on the Miami Heat. He's embraced this experience, as well. I wrote down something he said which is "It's inspiring for the Latin community to see a Hispanic player in the NBA." No doubt it's a thrill that he is here, will be playing tonight, and with the opportunity, as he said, to inspire many young people to play the game of basketball most importantly. But who knows, maybe he'll inspire a young boy to play in the NBA or a young girl who aspires to be in the WNBA one day.

With that, happy to answer any questions anyone has.

Q. Last year you said the first step is the TV rights, the NBA signing the biggest contract. Now regarding expansion, is it possible to explain this process of expansion and what does Mexico need to participate in this process?

ADAM SILVER: So there's no specific date set for expansion. It's something, as I said, to your point, that after we complete our media deals, we would begin the process.

The process has begun internally at the league office right now. It's something that we're continuing to model, to understand the economics of what it would mean to have additional teams.

As I've pointed out many times, it's in essence selling equity in the league. If you add additional partners, those television funds are locked in for the next decade or so, so you're sharing those proceeds with additional teams. But at the same time we see an opportunity to potentially expand the footprint of the NBA, whether it's in the United States or potentially here in Mexico City.

I'll say personally I would love to have a team in Mexico City. It's of course the largest city in North America. I believe if we were to come here, we would be Mexico's team, not just Mexico City's, and it would be a gateway into Latin America.

To your point, Capitanes was the first step along the way



and for us to begin experiencing what it means to operate here culturally in terms of altitude, in terms of the building, fan support, all those important factors. So I'm not ready to make news today specifically about bringing an expansion team to Mexico City, but as I said, it's something we will look at over time, and again, I think, as I said, 33rd game here in Mexico City, so there's no doubt about how much interest and support we have here.

Q. Commissioner, it's been 32 years since the first Mexico game. 30 games played right here. It's been 32 games total. What can the Mexican fans expect for the coming season in terms of Mexico City games, maybe bringing in his farewell tour LeBron and the Lakers, something like that, because every single team that came to Mexico City says it's a perfect place to play and the crowd is as good as the States.

ADAM SILVER: Well, thank you for saying that. I can't promise the Lakers or how long LeBron James will play, but no doubt there's tremendous interest in that club playing everywhere, and certainly here in Mexico City.

I think you ask a good question in terms of the future. We've played many games here at this point. We're a global league. We want to do more.

As I said earlier, bringing a G League franchise, Capitanes was one step along with doing that. I think we've expanded our media coverage here, which is very important, and there's also ways we can be represented here.

We launched an NBA store here last year. We're doing much more in terms of youth programs. The frustration I have sometimes is we have a global sport but only 30 teams, and how do we make our games more available to people around the world. Technology is one way to do that, and it's amazing the changes we're seeing in streaming and personalization and customization of these different feeds, augmented reality, virtual reality, all kinds of great ways to bring the game closer, but that's why I appreciate the fans who are here tonight. There's nothing quite like the experience of going to an NBA game.

We're thinking hard -- I'm here with the deputy commissioner, Mark Tatum, who's overseeing our international efforts, how we can do more over time, particularly here in Mexico City and Mexico.

Q. A lot has been said about the investment to develop players in Mexico but nothing has been said about interested ownership groups capable to run a franchise. Have you heard any offer that are financially capable?

ADAM SILVER: I know there are groups here in Mexico City and in Mexico that are financially capable. I have no doubt about that.

We have had very informal conversations over the years with businesses and business leaders who have expressed interest, but we've had no formal discussions only because we have not been in an expansion process, and we have not been soliciting specific interest. But I would say we're pleased to hear that that interest exists. There's just no process right now.

As I said earlier, we're not at the stage yet where we're specifically thinking about markets for expansion.

Q. Today you signed a new contract to keep coming to Mexico. Could you give us some details about it, how long and if there's any teams in mind, and second, is there any plans to have more games in Latin America such as the MLB that started their season earlier to play in Japan and the NFL that keeps expanding?

ADAM SILVER: In terms of the extension, there's no specific aspects of the deal to announce today. I would say it's multiyear, and we expect to continue coming back here beyond even the extent of that extension because we've had such success with Zignia Live. It's been a great partnership in every way. I'm sure they are thinking about ways that we can increase our presence here in the same way we are.

In terms of other cities, again, as new arenas come online that's something that we will continue to think about. I, of course, pay attention to whether it's Major League Baseball or the NFL and they're doing fantastic things outside the United States, as well, and we certainly want to keep up with everything that our competitor leagues are doing. So we're paying attention to other opportunities to play regular-season games, to open our season. I would say logistically these things get complicated because we have such a dense regular season, 82 games, only a set number of days to play those games.

But I will say I flew, of course, here from New York, where my headquarters is. It's not a difficult flight at all. It's shorter than crossing the United States. Of all the places we could potentially expand to outside of the United States, logistically it's one of the easiest, and when we look at the criteria, that's an important one. We will continue to focus on it.

Q. How do you see the G League team working out in Mexico? And second, what do you think about having an actual NBA team in Mexico as a legacy for you?



ADAM SILVER: We're very pleased with how the G League team, Capitanes, is working out here in Mexico City. It's been a real success. We're very pleased with the ownership there. The U.S. based G League teams that have come here have had great experiences playing Capitanes. Of course they play here in this arena. Attendance was up dramatically last year, so we're very happy from that standpoint.

In terms of bringing an NBA franchise here, as I said earlier, that's something I would love to do. I don't think we're quite ready to do it yet. We'll continue to study that over time. Certainly as a global league, we very much want to expand, and to the extent -- we of course are in Canada now, and to the extent we can expand to the south, Mexico City would be at the top of the list. We're just not ready to make those specific plans today.

Q. Today you have a sold-out arena. Have you ever thought of having not only preseason games, not only official games, but friendly games like, I don't know, Capitanes with another NBA team or a Mexican team against NBA teams?

ADAM SILVER: We're always looking at other forms of competition, and to your point, probably we wouldn't do G League teams, of course, against the NBA. Competitively it wouldn't be the same. We've experimented with doing tournaments with NBA teams, with club teams from other leagues. It's a good suggestion. It's something we will continue to look at. We want to make sure, too, that it's competitively interesting for the fans.

But I'll say again, my mandate, my colleagues here from the NBA, our mandate is to grow the game of basketball and to grow interest. I think increasingly, people have a hunger for these experiences, that while media is how most fans experience our games, the opportunity to bring the experience to them live is unmatched. There's no technology that has replicated that yet.

So we know how valuable it is to bring these games. They're difficult to scale, but we also recognize there's no substitute.

Whether it's, as you said, friendlies, other forms of preseason games, regular-season games, tournaments, we will continue to look at all those different formats.

Q. What do you think the NBA can do or continue doing in order for Mexico to keep developing young talented players such as Karim Lopez and so on?

ADAM SILVER: It's a great question, and of course we

have our academy here now to help develop elite young players. That's something we're continuing to study because we also operate in a larger ecosystem of development for players, and of course an academy can only touch a small few.

Ultimately the goal is to scale these development activities so that players and increasingly young girls as well as young boys, wherever they happen to play, can be identified.

It may be with the use of some new technologies, like you can imagine, especially with AI, that young people can download or upload in this case some footage of them playing through their phones, it gets processed and at least it's the initial screening for talent, and then we send scouts to those communities to see whether that's a player who should be brought in for a tryout or then a player who then can compete against other top players.

We know the talent exists and we know the interest exists, but it is a bit frustrating that we don't have greater representation from Mexico in the NBA.

I think back on the expansion to Canada, for example, and it was almost exactly 30 years ago. Initially, of course, we were in Toronto and Vancouver. At the time we expanded to Canada - and 30 years flies by, I've been with the league that entire time - we had two players from Canada. Last season we had 28 players from Canada.

I recognize that our ability to be in the market will help influence young people, influence those great athletes to want to play basketball as opposed to other sports and then of course you need a system. So to the extent they have an aptitude for it and a passion and a desire, they have the ability for great coaching and to compete against other great young players.

All those things have to come together, but it's something that we're studying hard because we realize that to the extent we have more top players from Mexico, from Latin America, that will then increase interest here.

Q. Do you feel a different vibe in the arena with Jaime being a part of the game, the first time there's going to be a Mexican player on the court? And also, have you seen an increase in interest in the whole Latino community not only in Mexico but in the States, an increasing interest with Jaime, with one of our own, being part of the league?

ADAM SILVER: I do feel that different vibe in the arena here today with Jaime. I think it also helps he's in, of all markets, Miami, that has a huge Spanish-speaking



population there. In some cases more Spanish being spoken there than English. You feel it just in terms of walking around the community here and in the arena the number of jerseys you see represented of Jaime's and from the Miami Heat.

I know just from his comments in the media the last few days, the things he's done in the community -- which by the way is above and beyond what we had asked him to do. My friend Sharon here was telling me, who's running our media presence, that he stayed longer than he was supposed to, he was supposed to move on to other events and to practice, but he was so engaged with the young people at the NBA Store and the clinics and the other activities, so I think it is special.

To answer the last question, to the extent you have players that are from these markets, it's as if you're turning a switch. I understand it, and when I was growing up you find ways to connect to players, and sometimes it's because they're from your city, from your state, from your country, or as you get older it's because they went to the same university. What's so wonderful even about social media, you see how diverse these players are in terms of their interest. You may connect to them through the music they love or the food they eat or whatever their interests happen to be.

We look for this kind of connectivity and this storytelling, but we certainly are seeing it through Jaime, and I definitely feel it today in the arena.

Q. Recently the NFL commissioner said in Europe that there could be a Super Bowl outside the States. Could Mexico host an NBA All-Star Game here in Mexico?

ADAM SILVER: As I said, it's very important that I compete with these other leagues, and if Roger Goodell said that, I don't want to be far behind him. There's a long list of NBA cities that are also competing to get All-Star Games, but I think if we were to bring an All-Star Game, again, outside of our U.S. cities or of course Toronto, Mexico City would be at the top of our list. It's very proximate to the states. We know we have a state-of-the-art arena here. We have a great fan base. We have a city that people love to come to that increasingly -- I should add, of course, Mexico is the United States' No. 1 trading partner. I think it's close to a trillion dollars of import and export between the two countries, so that's significant, as well, in terms of the amount of commerce that happens between these countries in terms of bringing an All-Star Game here.

I thank you for asking the question. It is something we will continue to look at and study.

Q. We've talked a lot about having an expansion team here in Mexico or more regular-season games of NBA. I don't know if it is on your hands maybe to show the WNBA the path to come to Mexico and why not have a WNBA game here in Mexico City, as well.

ADAM SILVER: So it is something that I am going to talk to my colleague Commissioner Engelbert on Monday when we're both back in the office. We work very closely together, and I think that the WNBA has some other more immediate priorities in terms of the growth of their league. Obviously they're coming off a tremendous season, huge uptick in attendance, huge uptick in viewership and fan interest, and I think they should be bringing a game here. We will talk to our colleagues about it.

I think even just based on discussions I've had today, there's great receptivity, and we're seeing similar upticks -- we talked before about NBA player development, but I'm purposely including WNBA because it's amazing to see the growth in the numbers for young girls who are playing the sport, as well.

Q. Regarding these last two points, the NBA All-Star Game and the WNBA, you included in this last All-Star Game great activity, including Sabrina in the three-point contest. Are you planning to continue this kind of activity and are you thinking about changing the format of the game since there is a lot of talking around the competitive level of the game?

ADAM SILVER: You had to ask that. Such a sore point. Yes, we are hard at work.

Somewhere in this room is my colleague Byron Spruell and Joe Dumars, who run basketball operations for the league. They are back at the lab -- not literally, but they have been, thinking about new concepts.

We're going to be in San Francisco this year, the home of the Golden State Warriors. We've had direct conversations with Steph Curry. It's a home game for him. I know he's very prideful and wants to make sure that the players put their best foot forward, so we're looking at other formats.

I think there's no doubt that the players were disappointed as well in last year's All-Star Game. We all want to do a better job providing competition and entertainment for our fans.

To your other question about the Sabrina and Steph shootout, of course, Sabrina Ionescu is from the Bay Area. Of course as I said, Steph is going to be there, and I can't remember if they've formally committed or informally



committed but they know they're going to be doing this again. They are looking forward to it.

I think as soon as they walked off the court after the competition last year, in fact they said we need more than one round to make it even fairer. So we're going to be doing more things.

I think as Sabrina -- I'm going to get her quote wrong, but she said something to the extent after the competition that shooters are shooters, and it just shows what's happening in society in terms of the growth of women's sports, not just in the WNBA and in basketball but in all sports.

I think it's fantastic because obviously most people -- most of us who played sports as a kid never ever play on an elite level, but it becomes a very important part of our lives. And so much of what our mission is through the NBA and the WNBA is to improve people's lives through sports.

So if we can get more participation, not just for the physical activity but for all the values it represents. And I think showcasing those kinds of activities where you see men and women both competing in basketball at All-Star events should increasingly become a big part of it. And incidentally when you look at the interest in terms of viewership last year, one of the highlights was that Sabrina-Steph shootout, so we do want to do more of that.

Q. Last year I interviewed a few people that came and they were worried about the prices, the increase of prices coming here to Mexico. Are you working on that, or can we expect more increasing prices?

ADAM SILVER: You're referring to ticket prices?

Q. Ticket prices, yes.

ADAM SILVER: The issue with ticket prices is of course we always want to make sure people have access to the games. The problem these days is there's such a fluid market, what we call a secondary market for tickets that if you artificially charge below what people are willing to pay, they just resell them to people who are willing to pay more, so it's always a challenge. There's things we do -- I'm looking at my colleagues here in Latin America and Mexico City to work with the community to make sure that young people are represented at these games, to make sure that community organizations are represented at these games. But when you put them on sale, again, if you charge less than people are willing to pay, people who are ticket scalpers buy them and resell them.

That doesn't mean we can't try to solve the problem. We want to make sure we're delivering opportunities for people

in the community, not just people who can afford the most expensive tickets. It's something we are focused on, and I think we will have representatives of the community here tonight.

Q. I don't know if you guys have a plan for having a team that every year plays five or ten games here in Mexico City instead of having an expansion team? Maybe it could be easier.

ADAM SILVER: It's something that we're talking more about at the league office, not just here in Mexico City but in other places in the world, as well. As I said, as a global league, we want to bring these experiences to people around the world.

Right now we have, of course, an 82-game regular season, have in the home market in the U.S. I think the issue is over time as we expand our footprint, could we take some of those now home games or games played in U.S. arenas and bring them not just to Mexico City but other places in the world so that we can expand our presence.

I think it is something that we should be looking at and looking at pretty seriously.

Again, I can tell by virtue of even just being here today and the games we've played here in the past, it really makes a difference showing up. As to the earlier question, you feel the vibe in the building, you feel the vibe in the community when you're present. We always say it's the same reason music groups, they stream their music but they also show up because it has an impact on those communities when they're present.

It's a great point, and as we look to grow this league globally over time, I think those are the kinds of things we need to look at: How it is that we can bring more NBA basketball and more regular-season games to other cities outside of our current NBA cities.

Q. The All-Star thing is interesting. Are you talking about making changes to the game for this year?

ADAM SILVER: We are. We're looking at different formats for this year's All-Star Game. So it's not a traditional game format.

Just real quickly on that, again, as I said earlier, I think everyone was disappointed in what they saw last year. It wasn't just the league, it was the players, as well, the Players Association. I think we all did what we thought we could, thinking we would particularly -- in Indiana, sort of the heartland of basketball, somehow we would give it the college try, and we'd see a more competitive game.



But I would add, I think even if you could turn the clock back and it was a bit more of a competitive game but still just sort of a standard NBA game, I think the fans would want more.

I think we saw it in the Steph-Sabrina shootout that we talked about earlier. I think that All-Star should be an opportunity for the players to showcase their talent but also to have a bit of fun and to maybe present some things to fans that they typically don't see over the course of a long regular season, especially when, even if they play with more intensity for an All-Star Game, it's unlikely to match a playoff game, and there's plenty of opportunities to see lots of playoff games.

Byron Spruell, Joe Dumars who are here today, Evan Wasch in the league office, they've formed a committee talking to team representatives, as well, and directly to the Players Association saying let's try something new. Let's come back, and obviously it's not that far off, but we want to do something that will excite the fans and also excite the players, so it's something they're enthusiastic about participating in.

Q. With all the talk of expansion and you guys are starting to consider this, is it to expand to 31 or to 32?

ADAM SILVER: Well, nothing has been set, and we haven't even determined whether to expand yet. My sense is if we expanded we'd do an even number, I think, because then we might have to do some adjustments in the conferences, but I think it makes sense to have two conferences of 16 teams if we were to do it.

There have been times in the past in the NBA when we had an odd number, so it's possible, but I think we'd most likely, if we were to expand, look to expand to two cities.

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