

NBA Berlin Game 2026: Magic vs Grizzlies

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Berlin, Germany

Uber Arena

Commissioner Adam Silver

Press Conference

ADAM SILVER: Very much appreciate all of you being here for this game. I'd just first like to talk a little bit about being here in Berlin and just generally the enthusiasm for basketball in Germany. We're the fastest-growing sport right now in this country. There's, in essence, a golden era, I would say, of the sport. You have the World Cup champion, the Euro[Basket] champion and just tremendous enthusiasm for the game anywhere I've been in town.

Just to talk a little bit about the history of basketball here, many people may not know that basketball came to Germany shortly after James Naismith created the game in Massachusetts in the United States over 130 years ago. Shortly after that game was created, Christian missionaries brought the game of basketball to Germany. Then jump ahead to the 1936 Olympics here in Berlin, that's when basketball was first introduced into the Olympic movement. In fact, James Naismith came here to Berlin for those games and purportedly tossed up the ball for the opening tip of the Games. So there is that long history here.

We have been playing NBA games in Germany for over 40 years now, but previous games were friendlies or preseason games. This is, after all these years, the first regular-season game that we will have played on German soil. So we're particularly excited about that.

Of course we're fortunate the Orlando Magic features three German players on their roster. Of course the Wagner brothers get the most attention. They are from here in Berlin. They have led activities throughout town, clinics with Alba Berlin. They've taken their teammates to see the sites, out to dinner, et cetera, and created a great experience for everyone here.

Speaking of the Orlando Magic, let me thank the DeVos family. The governor of the team is Dan DeVos. Brought a huge traveling party over from the States to experience Berlin and Germany, and we're very appreciative. And the Grizzlies organization, as well, have a very large traveling party here.



You can't not mention Dirk Nowitzki while we're here in Germany. I think Franz Wagner referred to him, as a youth said he was the Michael Jordan of German basketball for young people. It so happens Dirk is here for these games. He's now in a different capacity. He's a commentator for the Amazon Prime Video service, who is covering this game. We're thrilled to have Dirk with us.

Just lastly before I answer your questions, I want to briefly mention this notion, this vision we have potentially of a European league, something we've been talking about for a while now. Mark Tatum is here with me, our deputy commissioner. We're using the opportunity while we're here in Europe -- of course we're moving on to London after this game with these same teams -- to have more discussions around this opportunity.

I would just say we continue to be enormously excited about it. We've been meeting with clubs that are interested in participating in our league. We've been in discussions with other potential stakeholders, including media companies that would like to cover it, potential media partners and traditional sponsors who want to work with us on the league. We're looking at the opportunity to grow the arena infrastructure, not just here in Germany but throughout the continent.

It's something that we're enormously excited about. For me, as I've talked a little bit about the history of the growth of basketball over the last 130 years here in Europe, it would seem that the next frontier potentially is the launch of this league.

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

Q. Commissioner, you mentioned the NBA Europe league that is probably going to come at some point. What I was wondering, the NBA is making huge revenues through broadcasting rights. We all know the figures. How is the funding model for a potential NBA European league? Who's going to pay for it, and where is the money going to come from?

ADAM SILVER: The funding would potentially come from,

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at least initially, the member clubs of the league. I think similar to any startup venture, the participants would be the investors, and over time would hope to seek a return.

I would only say that in the NBA, despite very large revenues, we manage to spend most of that money on a combination of players and investing in infrastructure and marketing. I think if we were to successfully launch this new league, it will take a while, I think, before it is a viable commercial enterprise.

I think all the participants recognize that this is not for those who have a short-term perspective. Not that they are comparable, but I think about our WNBA, which is now going into its 30th season this year. I remember for the first decade of that league, when David Stern was overseeing it as the commissioner of the NBA, the question was usually how long will you stick with this, because it didn't seem like it was going to be a successful venture.

Jump ahead to 30 years later, where it's amazing what's happening in women's basketball right now. I'm not suggesting there's comparability, although I would also add we would like to do a women's league in Europe, as well, if we can figure out the correct model.

But I would just say that launching leagues, especially if it's a mix of existing teams and potentially new teams and there need to be arenas built in certain markets, what we are telling interested parties is that you need to have a very long-term perspective.

Q. Franz Wagner yesterday talked to us about NBA Europe, as well, and he mentioned that it could be a combination of the best of both worlds, but he also emphasized the tradition of European basketball. Is that something that you think about, and are you worried about push-back from maybe more traditional forces in European basketball?

ADAM SILVER: I honestly couldn't agree more with Franz and other European NBA players that I've talked to directly about this. Most recently, Luka Doncic and I had a discussion about this league. I think it's critically important that we respect the traditions of European basketball.

The competitive level of European basketball is fantastic, and of course some of our very best NBA players were developed in Europe. The Wagner brothers are great examples. And five of our last seven MVPs are European players. Let me just add, too, that I should also mention our partner in this operation is FIBA, of course a European-based organization.

I think Franz hit it right. We're trying to find the best

combination of the old and new, tradition and innovation.

I think frankly, that's what the NBA brings to the table. I think it's also why it's important not only to have FIBA as our partner but existing basketball organizations who understand the culture of European basketball, understand the traditions, the history, what makes European basketball unique in so many ways.

It's partly why we've taken our time. I know it's frustrated some people who have asked us these questions, like all right, be definitive. I think part of the reason we've gone slowly here is we want to make sure we are hearing from all the different stakeholders, making sure we understand what we are potentially taking on.

Q. As a follow-up, reports came out since the beginning of the week that the EuroLeague will have sent a letter to the NBA threatening legal action if you continue to pursue teams under EuroLeague license. Is it a reality that they sent such a letter, and do you think now it's inevitable that we have a clash between this NBA and FIBA project and EuroLeague, who has decided to kind of strike back?

ADAM SILVER: I send the legal letters to my lawyers, so I'll let them handle that. I don't think by any means it's inevitable that there is a clash. I think there is an opportunity here to grow European basketball, and frankly, I'm much more focused on the competitive landscape, not just with other sports in Europe but with other entertainment options. That's how we view the NBA. We don't think of ourselves, even in the United States, as necessarily competing against other basketball organizations or other sports organizations. We're competing for people's attention. We are, in many ways, a sport entertainment product.

If I thought that the ceiling was the existing EuroLeague and their fan interest, we wouldn't be spending the kind of time and attention we are on this project. I'm a huge fan, as many of you know, of European football. I'm amazed at the sense of followership and belonging, almost the tribalism that comes with the love and support of these organizations, and that to me is where we're setting our sights.

I think there is plenty of room for competition. There's plenty of room for somebody to be a fan of both their favorite football club and their favorite basketball club. So that's where my focus is right now.

Q. Should we get you on the record as to who your favorite football club is?



ADAM SILVER: I'm not going to answer that question. Come on. You came all the way from the United States to ask me that question?

Q. Okay, one more about NBA Europe. The last time we were together in the States, you had also talked about 2026 being the year that the Board of Governors would decide on American expansion. On that front, how do you do both, start a new league here and set that up in roughly the same time frame, at least what's been floated? And I did want to know, one of your most marketable stars in these NBA games is Ja, and he's not playing tonight. I just wonder if you had a thought or concern about his availability.

ADAM SILVER: I'll begin with Ja. Yeah, I know he has a tremendous following globally, and I wish he were able to play tonight. I still am holding out hope he'll be able to play when we're in London on Sunday. Yeah, I'm disappointed he's not on the floor tonight, but I understand he's injured.

In terms of both focusing on domestic expansion and potential opportunity in Europe at the same time, I'm sure you can see the bags under my eyes, so yes. But we love hard work at the NBA. I would say I have an enormous deep bench of fantastic colleagues. Mark Tatum is one of them, sitting here. We have the strong support from the NBA governors and many of the personnel at those teams who have real knowledge about European basketball, many of whom are European.

I'll also say that my job overseeing this enterprise is to help provide the blueprint, setting it in place, the elements that are necessary for success, but then step aside and let others do that work.

I would just say, for example, here in Europe we recognize if we are moving forward, we're going to need to do an enormous amount of hiring. Lots of people have reached out to us already who are interested in the opportunity.

Certainly I'll be very involved. I've been traveling to Europe a lot in the last two years for discussions. But again, by no means will it be me doing the day-to-day work.

In terms of domestic expansion in the U.S., yes, we've said this is the year we will announce if we are going forward or not. But that to me is very different because then all the work -- it's more process work, legal work, a certain amount of modeling. Then decisions need to be made if there's a competitive process about what groups will be operating in what cities, but then essentially it's quickly shifted to them.

I was with the league -- I had been with the league for

many years, but I was there when we expanded to Toronto and then Vancouver. So I've been through the experience before.

To me, honestly, the real heavy lift would be creating a new league in Europe. As I said, that's an enormous undertaking, which is why we've been moving one step at a time and being very careful and cautious and making sure we're covering all our bases.

Q. I would like to ask you about the NBA Europe project. In Spain, there's already some noise about the club Real Madrid could be one of the teams that has given their green light to the project. Could you confirm that report? By the way, there are confirmations from any teams?

ADAM SILVER: I'm not ready to confirm the specific reports. I will confirm that we've had discussions with Real Madrid and other Spanish clubs, as well. But as I've said, part of these initial round of discussions, and they've gone on for some time, I would put more in the category of fact finding, and for me to make sure I fully understand what would we be taking on in terms of a long-term investment, a further investment in European basketball. So it would be premature at this moment to talk about more specific conversations with any clubs.

Q. You've met Alba Berlin CEO Marco Baldi yesterday in a reception at City Hall. Can you talk about where you see Alba Berlin in this project and where the negotiations maybe are?

ADAM SILVER: Well, I won't be specific about the negotiations but only say that I'm very familiar with Alba Berlin, of course their great success here in Germany. To me, they are an exemplar of how a top-tier club should be run and organized. They have tremendous youth programs. They have deep fan support. They've created enormous enthusiasm around the game.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, look no further than the Wagner brothers, who were developed as part of the Alba Berlin ecosystem. They are the model of the type of club that we would like to see in a potential European league.

Q. As a Turkish basketball journalist and basketball fan, I really enjoy seeing regular-season NBA games in Europe, but I'm curious about the long-term plans. As you know, Istanbul is one of the major basketball cities in all of Europe. Do you think we might see a regular-season game in Istanbul in the future, especially with a superstar like Alperen Sengün?

ADAM SILVER: First of all, I've spent an enormous



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amount of time in Istanbul. I've been there for what was then the World Championship. We've played many NBA preseason games in Istanbul.

I can't sort of say specifically today that there's a timeline for returning -- for bringing a regular-season game to Istanbul, but we know it's a market that has enormous enthusiasm for basketball. Many of our great NBA players have been from Turkey. I'll just add, in terms of this European initiative, of course Istanbul is a market that we are looking at, as well, because we know there would be strong support there for a team in this league.

Q. You've talked about how basketball is the fastest-growing sport here, second perhaps behind football, but football's revenue is like 40 or 50 billion in Europe. How do you commercially hope to make a dent in that and get a bigger share of that revenue pie?

ADAM SILVER: I actually think what's happening now, and this is driving some of our interest, is that it's not a fixed pool of sport revenue. What we're seeing now -- look at any of the streaming services or any of the networks. Attention is being shifted from traditional scripted dramas to live premium sports.

We view ourselves as complementary to other sports leagues. In fact, as I said earlier, I'm a huge fan of what's happening in European football, which is continuing to grow.

For me, all that does is grow the marketplace. So we don't see ourselves as a substitute, and fans have enormous capacity to be fans of multiple teams, and in many cases this would be a fan under the same moniker as their favorite football team.

Rather than think of us as taking share from them, I look at the commercial side of basketball as it exists now in Europe, and it probably represents about one percent of the commercial sports marketplace.

At the same time, being the No. 2 sport in Europe and maybe faster growing than football, and only faster growing than football because they're so much larger than we are, that to me speaks to the opportunity exists to build a viable business around the sport.

Q. Moving around Berlin these past few days, it's been pretty hard to visually notice that such a big game is taking place today. Can you explain how the league prioritizes its different ways to promote events like this?

ADAM SILVER: We promote extensively through social

media and traditional media. I'd only say I can't speak for the amount of promotion in the city, only that when the tickets for this game went on sale, they sold out in a matter of minutes, and we have a record diverse group of fans at this game. In fact, that we can tell from the ticketing data, we have fans from 62 different countries that bought tickets for tonight's game.

As I've said before, because we don't bring many regular-season games to Europe, these games that we hold here become analogous to All-Star Games in many ways in that you can mark your calendar, you know the game is going to be there. It obviously helps to have three German players on the Orlando Magic, but it seems regardless of which teams we're bringing to London or Paris, and we announced we're going to Manchester next year, that we see a convergence of the basketball community.

If that's what you're seeing, I'm disappointed you're not seeing more visible signs of the fact that we're here in Europe. But I'd only say for the things we're doing, the programs, the clinics, the NBA House, et cetera, that we're doing in town here, we're seeing enormous enthusiasm.

Q. Clash or no clash with EuroLeague, where would you see the European league fitting in inside the FIBA ecosystem, their national team windows and international club competitions, and would it possibly replace a specific competition?

ADAM SILVER: The answer is that's the very reason we're partnering with FIBA, so that we can respect the FIBA calendar. I can't say whether as a result of this league FIBA would shift its calendar in any way. But they are our partner. So however they want to structure the competitive windows, we will follow their lead.

Q. You mentioned Luka earlier, that you talked to him. Is there a task force or an activation of current and former players who played in Europe and in the NBA to talk about, like I say, a task force of the NBA Europe program, and how are former or current players being involved in the process?

ADAM SILVER: There is a task force of former NBA players who are involved in giving us guidance. Tony Parker is one of them, and he, in fact, is here for these games.

There is not a specific task force in terms of current players, but many of those players are now reaching out to us and giving us advice, many of whom were developed in the junior programs, and Luka is a perfect example, obviously played for Real Madrid and is very familiar with



the system here.

As I said, we're taking advice from wherever it's coming. There's also some American players who spent some time playing in Europe before they came into the NBA. I've received a lot of calls recently from people saying, here's my view, here's where I see the opportunity, et cetera.

Q. Commissioner, you've been talking about how fond you are of football clubs in Europe, and obviously it's special in Germany, as well. Sometimes German football clubs don't seem too open-minded in terms of investments and stuff. Have you been talking to football clubs about involvement in NBA Europe? And also looking at the notion of Germany itself sometimes isn't very innovation friendly, as well. How would you rank German commitment and determination with respect to the NBA Europe project?

ADAM SILVER: First of all, at least for me, it feels like some of the greatest innovation in the world comes out of Germany. I think of some of the products that I use in the United States. At least my perception is a very innovative culture. Maybe not so in sport, I don't know.

I would only say the answer is, without being specific about Germany, we are talking to many different football clubs, some who operate basketball teams, some who don't. Because when I look across the board at European football, again, it's not only enormously popular and there's varying levels of sophistication, but no doubt there's a reason that they enjoy the success that they do, and much of it comes through sophistication in digital media, through broadcasting, through building fan loyalty, in many cases well over 100 years.

So we are paying a lot of attention to that, and I'd just say maybe going back to Alba Berlin, which I'm most familiar with, to me they are a very innovative organization. In fact, one of the discussions I was having with Marco was about youth basketball. I think there's a lot right now that American youth basketball can learn from the systems in Europe. I don't think, again, it's an accident that so many of our top-notch players are being produced by the systems here.

Q. I would like to ask you about the brand new league. Obviously you set the standard really high. You want to be the best league in Europe. How much time do you need from your plan to become the best league, and what do you have to do for that?

ADAM SILVER: It's a very fair question. Again, it's why I mentioned the growth of the WNBA earlier. I don't want to be more specific other than we need to be realistic, and to

me, this has less to do with the existing basketball ecosystem. Whether that existed or not, I think in some cases building a new brand, building new followership, creating those connections that these organizations have directly with their fans takes time, and there are no shortcuts.

As I've said to people who are considering investing in this league, this is not for those who are seeking short-term returns. This is something that will be multi-decades in the making. And just in the same way when I look at European football now, again, these traditions are passed on from father and mother to son and daughter, generation to generation.

I think one of the reasons that sport is so highly valued is that it does seem tribal in many ways, and then almost by definition, there shouldn't be an expectation that we can take an NBA blueprint, which may be relevant in certain ways and irrelevant in others, and to the questions that came earlier, and bring that to a European ecosystem.

Even just as I travel from country to country, traditions vary greatly. Again, I think what's most important for us is that we would make progress month by month, year by year, but come in with a long-term vision.

Just lastly, to me, what I'm seeing in sport around the world is that it's been a rising tide for everyone. Just to use the U.S. as an example, the NFL has grown, the NBA has grown, the NHL has grown, Major League Baseball is growing, college basketball is growing at the same time NBA is growing.

What we're really seeing is that people who are increasingly divided in many ways, in some cases not working in offices in the same way they did historically, maybe aren't having the same social experiences, are coming together through sport in ways that maybe we've never seen before.

While there's lots of ills that come from social media, that can also create community, a digital community. I look at some of these great European football teams, similar to the NBA, where they have hundreds of millions of followers, something that when I started in the NBA was not even conceivable.

I think about how we can connect people, not just in Europe but globally, and one of the ways to do that is sport.

Lastly, I'll say, while we're looking at this opportunity to create a league in Europe, if we do it properly, the league may be physically based here in Europe, but the hope

would be, just like with the NBA, that people are following it around the world. So that just in the way these great football teams -- we could go down the list of these most storied traditions, there are followers throughout the United States, in Asia, South America, et cetera. That's what makes these sporting organizations so special, and that would be the same thing we'd try to accomplish with a new league here in Europe.

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