

NBA All-Star Rising Stars Practice

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Team Tamika

Paolo Banchero

Press Conference



Q. Hello. What was your "welcome to the NBA" moment?

PAOLO BANCHERO: My "welcome to the NBA" moment, I think was my first game. We played in Detroit. First regular-season game, in Detroit. I had a fast break and dunked over the top of a guy, and it was kind of a surreal moment.

I didn't really realize what I did in the moment. But after the game, I just saw a clip and realized really what I did. It was crazy.

Q. You know where you are in the standings, and you know how crazy the last 27 games are going to be. How vital is this break to get everybody's minds right? And compared to last year, how much fun do you think this will be knowing that every single game you play the rest of the way is going to have some sort of playoff implication?

PAOLO BANCHERO: It's exciting. Like you said, just having all these games after the break really mean something, every game. We've got to be ready to go because we're trying to make this final push.

The break, just everyone getting a chance to take a breath and get whatever it is they need, whether it's rest, time with their friends and family. It's a great time to just take that time. So I look forward to getting back and making that push at the end.

Q. When you've gone up against other All-Stars throughout the season, have they talked to you at all? And if so, what kind of messaging and what kind of support have they given you as far as confidence going forward?

PAOLO BANCHERO: Some, for sure, have just said little gems to me throughout the season, told me I'm playing well and they love what I'm doing, stuff like that. Then

once I did make the All-Star, guys definitely went out of their way to tell me congratulations, which is dope because not even really knowing the guys, just them coming up and saying congrats, it's just a brotherhood in the NBA, and I appreciate it.

Q. I feel like you're part of the group we call the KD school. You, Chet, everybody starting to hoop that's been working out with him during the summer. What are some things you can talk about in terms of his workout, learning the pivots, the spins, everything that you've learned over the summer. What can you say about that?

PAOLO BANCHERO: Yeah, working out with him just showed me how to be even more efficient as a scorer. Like you said, a lot of pivots. A lot of movement without dribbling. When you catch, getting your defender off balance. Just being able to simplify the game and getting to your spots, that was one of the major takeaways I had from working out with him.

It wasn't seven, eight dribbles. There was never anything like that. It was simple three-, four-dribble combos, pump fakes, pivots, turnarounds, all stuff to be able to rise over the top and make the game a lot more simple.

Q. Can you share with us your last experience in Mexico City? Mexico has a huge fan base. All the games were sold out in Mexico. Can you share with us your experience over there?

PAOLO BANCHERO: It was great. We got to go there early in the year. The fanfare was crazy. I didn't know what to expect, but sold-out game. The media at practice was crazy. You could just tell how excited they were for us to be there playing.

As far as the game, the game was super fun, super energetic. The crowd was into it. Every play that was made, they were reacting. It was a really fun game to be a part of.

Q. You faced Victor enough to kind of get a read on him, and I'm not referring to what he does on the court,



but just his personality. What's your read on what his demeanor is like and just how he carries himself?

PAOLO BANCHERO: I don't really know him too well, but he seems like a pretty smart guy who understands who he is. He's the number one pick, so they're counting on him to turn around the franchise, and I think he understands that. I think he understands the pressure that comes with it.

I think he's handling it well. I think he's playing well.

Q. What current Duke player do you think will be in Rising Stars next year?

PAOLO BANCHERO: On the team right now? That's a good question. I like some of the guys they got this year. Some guys have been playing well.

I think Jared McCain has been playing pretty well. I think Kyle Filipowski has a chance. He's been playing well. Yeah, it depends who comes out of the draft, but I'm always watching them, cheering them on. I like some of their players, for sure.

Shout-out my guy Jeremy Roach too.

Q. I wanted to ask you, first five games weren't the best at the start, but November 2nd, you started, 30 points that game. After that you have not looked back. Talk about how the start of the season went. For me, one thing I noticed was that you weren't getting to that between-the-legs cross. When you get to that, a lot of dangerous stuff happens. Just talk about that, those first five games and what you did after to get on that stretch and now becoming an All-Star too.

PAOLO BANCHERO: Coming into this season, I had just played in the World Cup. When we got done, I think it was like two or three weeks into training camp, so usually that's like when you get built up and ramped up to get in the training camp. Me, it was the opposite. I didn't touch a ball after that for two weeks. So I came to training camp just body like I've been sitting down, not really into it.

So I had to kind of ramp up through the training camp, through the preseason, and that can take from two weeks to maybe a month. To start the year, I was kind out of rhythm, and I was kind of playing. I was kind of having trouble fitting back in, I think to our team, after playing so long with the guys.

I think I also just -- the role I was playing for USA, I wouldn't say it clouded how I played the first four games, but I had to get back to who I really was, having the ball in my hands, being that guy.

I think it was the first four games, that West Coast trip, where I wasn't really playing well. I wasn't even shooting the ball, just kind of out there floating. That Utah game was where I had to snap out of it. I went to dinner the night before with two of my coaches and had a good talk with them. Just wanted to come out with a clear head. After that game, I knew it was over. I just didn't want to look back.

After that, I had to start getting the between cross and start getting back in my bag, for sure.

Q. Do you feel like a lot of people try to put you in that 4 to 5 when you have the ability to play 1 through 5 instead of just always being a 4 or 5 because of your size?

PAOLO BANCHERO: I'm not going to sit here and say I'm a point guard, but I definitely think I can handle the ball, initiate a lot of things, create plays. I think I'm growing a lot as a playmaker, being able to set up my teammates. That's something I take pride in, being able to play whatever position is needed.

Obviously, I know how my size is an advantage. So I don't want to get too much into staying on the perimeter. I want to be able to mix it up and always keep the defense off balance. That's something that I think me, my coaches, we always try to balance and work on is how much I'm handling, how much I'm inside and just trying to find that perfect balance.

Q. I guess you're a 4, but you do everything. Wemby, is he a 4 or a 5? We ask all the time. Is Bam a 4 or a 5? Great players can play and defend all five positions, or at least four of them. Do you think the position thing, it's over?

PAOLO BANCHERO: I wouldn't say it's over, but I think it's just changing. I think it's more of -- really it varies from team to team, system to system, how guys fit, what the team's running, how they use a certain player.

I think like with Victor, I think I saw like a difference in his stats from playing power forward and center. So like when you're out on the perimeter, like I said, with my size, I don't want to be on the perimeter too much because then you become inefficient or taking bad shots. So you want to stay kind of around the rim, but also you want to be able to use your versatility to keep the defense off balance and make plays from the perimeter.

Just finding that for me has been a challenge, just since coming into the league, because I think, when I first came

in, I kind of just wanted the ball and wanted to dribble around and see what I can do. Now in year 2, I've been a lot more intentional with how I get to my spots, how I'm being used and where I'm trying to get to on the floor.

Even if I do have it as a handler, I'm still trying to get to this spot on the floor. So that's been a big learning curve for me.

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