

Golden State Warriors Media Conference

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Jess Smith

Brandon Schneider

Media Conference



BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Hello, everybody. Welcome. Thanks for being here. This is one of those days -- I'm going to hold this maybe.

This is one of those days that we'll never forget, and speaking of days, we'll never forget, a lot's happened in the last three months since we were here in October gathering to announce that we were the proud owners of the next WNBA expansion team.

We've been working on locker room facilities here at Chase Center. We've been working on our Oakland practice facility. We've been working on a team name and branding no. We are not announcing that today; so I'm heading off the questions. That will come in the next couple months.

And all the while on a parallel path, we have been going through an extensive hiring process to figure out who would be leading our WNBA franchise. She happens to be -- this is a spoiler alert. She happens to be sitting next to me today. I know by now you guys have all read the press release, but I did want to take a couple of minutes to talk to you about what we were looking for and why we think Jess is the perfect fit.

So as you know by now, she's been at Angel City Football Club as their head of revenue since 2020 when they launched, and she's -- as part of the role, leading a lot of different functions, including tickets, you'll correct me if I get this wrong, tickets, partnerships, broadcast, data and analytics, operations, and everything in between for what is widely considered the most successful team in the NWSL.

As we embarked on this journey, there were several things that we aligned on that we were looking for in this person in, Jess, as it were. We obviously were looking for someone that's a face of the franchise, and both internally, as you think about the team that she's now going to build and hire, but also externally as you think about with our partners and in the community.

I believe you guys hopefully know by now that community engagement and making a difference in the community is a huge part of what we're about at the Golden State Warriors, something we are really proud of, and that will be an equal priority for Jess and our WNBA team.

So we obviously have the broader organization that's just in, and we're here to support. But we were looking for someone that would really run this enterprise day-to-day. We all have day jobs, and so you know, she's going to build a team and be like responsible for that holistically as a standalone entity with support as needed and as wanted, probably more -- more aptly stated.

We were looking for somebody who had cross-functional leadership experience to foster collaboration with the team. We were looking for someone who was entrepreneurial and innovative. Someone who was really going to push the envelope. We have a lot of respect and think we can learn a lot from existing WNBA teams for sure. But we also think there's an opportunity to do things differently. The league is on a really nice upward trajectory now. We think there's a ton of momentum right now in women's sports and we are excited about being a catalyst for that next phase of growth.

Speaking of growth, one thing we talk a lot about internally is having a growth mindset, and for us, or for me, what that really means is always thinking about what's next, always thinking about how we are going to get better, both as individuals and in this case, more importantly as a team, and always thinking bigger and Jess definitely does that.

And then the last thing, it's probably obvious, but it's important for me to say it is someone who is the right cultural fit.

So we -- and Jess can speak to this if she wants, we put her through the ringer. She's met several members of our executive team over the last several weeks and spent time with Joe Lacob, Peter Guber, and it was really unanimous within our group that she was the perfect fit to lead our team.

So as you think about all the things I said, we think Jess



checks every box and then some, and she will be formally starting her role as president of WNBA Golden State on February 14th. So with that, I would like to turn to over to Jess to say a few words.

JESS SMITH: I feel like we're on SNL doing a skit. Can you guys hear me okay?

I feel like a lot of the attributes that Brandon just mentioned are probably what made me a really difficult child. Like "entrepreneurial" is so nice to say, difficult, but in a good way.

That said, like it's so incredible to be here today with all of you and have this opportunity. It's been such a rewarding journey to get here today. I have a few shoutouts because I'm sure that's why you're here, but my older daughter, Kipton, my mom, my incredible husband, Scott, my friend, Kristen, and my mother-in-law, Janine, season thank you so much for your support and being here. It really means the world.

Now the real shoutouts: The time spent with Joe Lacob and Peter Guber and Brandon Schneider in this process were so affirming in coming to this organization and being in women's sports for the last four years. Intentions of why you're here and your vision is as to what we are building, and that being genuine, was incredibly important to me.

And through every single meeting I had with the three of them, that was beyond apparent that the same expertise and passion and drive that they have, every day in building everything that the Warriors are a part of is also exactly what they want to replicate but really in a way that really hones a community within the WNBA firsthand. And I shared often that whether I was a part of that or not, as somebody who is just incredibly passionate about what is at the helm in women's sports, I was just so thrilled that they were at the table in bringing that expertise to the table and to the W.

The fact that I have a chance to now be a part of that firsthand, and to join something that I know all of us will be relentless in pursuing greatness in, is really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I take very seriously.

I do want to acknowledge Angel City. The last four years have been something short of incredible with really exceptional people built something that nobody thought was possible. That tenacity and resilience and lesson that is we learned throughout the way will be something that I take with me in this chapter to make sure that what we put together here is genuine and has a North Star that really invites everyone to come along for that ride.

Truly I can't wait to get started and I cannot wait for 2025. I should say that but the answer in my seat is, I can wait for 2025. I need a little bit of time, right, to build this.

So I look forward to getting started and look forward to building and inviting you all on the journey, as well.

But happy to answer any questions and thank you again to these incredible folks that are part of this.

Q. It seems natural to think that the Golden State Warriors are a semi-blueprint when you mention replicating some of what they have done. I want to hear what your vision is. You have an idea of what you want to do when you start at a place from the ground up to hold it to your liking; what's your vision on and off the court?

JESS SMITH: On the court you can rewind the tape to Joe's statement at the expansion ceremony. I think I was supposed to write, like, "gets a ring into the first five years of my contract," I don't think they let that one slide but that would be lovely.

Of course the expertise and greatness that's expected is what we want to replicate. But the opportunity to build something right now from the ground up is inviting everyone to be a part of that, right. Doing a lot of listening in this first 30 to 60 days, the basketball history in the Bay Area is unprecedented, especially right now in my opinion, and leaning on that.

But also sharing the organization that we are going to build represents what folks want to be a part of. Inviting other people, stakeholders, partners, fans, supporters, media, to let us know their thoughts. We want to get this right. We want to make sure Warriors nation that are unbelievable is a part of this in every step that we can, but also that everyone who maybe is a Warriors fan is also invited to the table to do this with us.

Q. It wasn't that long ago that you started with Angel City but feels like things since that moment, women's sports has hit a different trajectory in public consciousness. What have you seen change in terms of willingness to invest in organizations such as the ownership in Angel City or now the Warriors? What has changed in these past five years?

JESS SMITH: Yeah, great question. I also think working at Angel City, and maybe in any women's sports capacity feels like dog years,, so I think I was there 12 years, even though it was a little bit under four with what we were able to do.

Being on the inside and having a pulse to the conversations behind the scenes, it is really unprecedented with what we are going to start to see more public facing. The brand that are curious about being at the table; how they want to utilize women's sports to define their values and do that with the consumers having more control and understanding that buying a ticket matters, buying merchandise matters. That type of community and opportunity to join something that they truly believe in is at the helm of what I think the growth of women's sports is, which is that mix of sport and purpose and pop culture in the most beautiful way where it really embodies all of those things.

Media, right. The coverage and those talking about it in those. Even celebrity and influencers sitting courtside, the NBA athletes have been a huge factor in bringing that attention to the W specifically as well.

That type of collaboration and acknowledgment at every single level is really when special things begin to happen. You have investment coming at an ownership level. You have partners understanding what they are responsible for; you have media and broadcast deals understanding what they are responsible for, and you have consumers rewarding all of them for those decisions.

Really there's a lot more to come but it's every week we are seeing new headlines when it comes to women's sports, and it's not specific sports. It's everything, and it's in different locations. It's nationally and it's globally.

Q. You've had this experience already, so can you talk about the experience of building something, getting folks exciting, sponsors excited, what you don't have a product quite yet, you don't have a name and you don't have a roster with players that you can attach to, how do you build and what's that challenge? What does that look like?

JESS SMITH: That's a great question. I reflect on the Angel City days off with the partners that jumped on board before we had a brand, before we had a logo and before we had a place to play. Being part of women's sports is about vision and about emotion, and it's about folks come together to build together, and collectively. And I think inviting people into that process in the earliest of phases is such a power that we have that we aren't actually able to see anywhere else in sport, right, when it can come together from day one in this capacity.

It's really about making sure that we have a vision and we are inviting people into exactly who we are and what we are going to do and how they can be a part of it with us and of course nailing everything that makes people feel like we

represent that in the brand, in the name, in the identity, in what the game day experience will be like. That's my job. My job is to, you know, work with the incredible folks that already exist within the Warriors.

It's also to hire other experts in their field. It's to build a can't-miss experience when it comes to game days that people want to be here and be a part of, and to make sure that that continues to grow and is replicated as largely as possible.

Q. What did you like most about from your time with Angel City, being part of a first-year franchise that excites you about getting ready to get started with WNBA Golden State?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: There's really no better feeling than looking around on opening day and seeing a group of people come together to build something that will be there for all time, and that will set a trajectory of success.

It may be advantageous to say, but in year one, all the things I just mentioned that we have to get right, that's just the beginning. If we earn the right to do those things, if we earn the right to have the incredible game day experience; have the incredible partnership that we are looking to do. There's so much more that's beyond just the regular game day experience, right. You look the Warriors as an incredible example of that and their footprint globally, it's heart nod to have the aspirations to match just that.

Q. The Bay Area has an extensive women's basketball history. You go down to the road to Stanford; Cal went to the Final Four about ten years ago. How do you build on that as a professional organization and what is your plan?

JESS SMITH: I'll be at the Stanford game on Friday, so looking forward to that.

The women's community build around basketball here in the Bay Area are ones to learn from and to make sure that we are embodying. It's also vast. There's multiple universities and here and there's multiple points of history here.

So I think it goes back to that original point of, I need to meet everyone. I need to know what they see as additive to this marketplace, and what they think ensures that their legacy is also be tied to our legacy as something really that unifies the entire Bay Area.

Q. Going back to your time at Angel City and the opportunities that you had there to learn, what can you take from those experiences there and apply them here



at the WNBA and Golden State?

JESS SMITH: I didn't learn anything about acting if that's what you're getting at with all the celebrities that we had involved, or how to play the sport of soccer. I think it's beautiful but still not very good at it.

The learnings that I have from Angel City are immense that in that we did something no one had done before, and I think the main learning to take away is that you don't have to think about doing things the way that everyone else has done it before, right. The different leagues I've had a chance to be a part of: The National Hockey League, Major League Soccer, Major League Baseball, they all have different strengths and weaknesses. They all have different ways they monetize and commercialize their business, and they are call very powerful for that.

But getting into the NWSL, getting into women's soccer, and now having the opportunity to learn and do the same in the WNBA, I think it's about having that fresh lens; the entrepreneur that Brandon said of looking at something a little bit differently. "Does it have to be that way," is a really important request he to ask, or what if it was this "and," like the "yes, and" culture is going to be really important to how we put this together.

Q. I don't know if it's way too early to ask this but you mentioned earlier the infrastructure set up with the locker rooms getting ready. Do you have a sense what crowd capacity you're going to have here? Are you going to open up the upper deck or what's that going to look like?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: It's a good question. We are still working through all that. We knew before we announced that we were purchasing a team that there was a lot of interest. I get asked, whether it's team members, members of the media, partners, ticket holders, everyone: When are you guys getting a team? I think people realized there was a good shot we would do it at some point.

And ever since the announcement, it's been, like, exponential, right. So we have over 4,000 people that have put down deposits for season tickets already, which would give us one of the biggest season ticket bases. We don't even have a name. Just hired our first full-time leader with the team. So there's a long way to go.

So we'll see. We'll see where that all goes. One of the things we love about Jess is always thinking bigger and there are no boundaries. Who knows? Whatever it is. I would expect a sold-out crowd not only on opening night at Chase Center but every game. That's really how we think about this. No pressure. (Laughter).

JESS SMITH: I love it. Pressure is a privilege.

Q. You referenced the initial press conference, and I don't know what specifically you meant from that, but Joe has long loved women's sports and women's basketball. He kind of shared how he went to a Stanford game years ago and met Tara and that sort of helped spark his love that he already had. But how much does that mean to you? And also, the connection to Oakland, because Oakland kind of needs this, too, for all the sports its lost, teams that it's lost in recent years here?

JESS SMITH: With the different teams I've been a part of, I've also been a part of a variety of different leadership moments and I've shared this with Brandon again today in affirming it, and it's odd to talk about you with you right here.

But Joe, don't tell him I said this, you know, the true passion around every piece of what this team is going to mean, and certainly what the Warriors are, too, is not lacking in any way shape and form. And to have the care and the trust at the same time into knowing what this team can and will be to represent the Bay Area, and the legacy that's expected.

Candidly, like under this leadership group, you know, Joe and Peter have earned the trust of the Bay Area fans, right, and that is such an immense advantage for us because we get to build under that type of trust where fans believe that we are going to do our best to be the best at every single thing that we do.

And so it really is a privilege to have the opportunity to align with those types of values and build under it, because our partners and our fans, like that's a huge step in the right direction.

Oakland is an incredible city and one that's really important to me. I worked for the Oakland A's for many years. I would wake up early and go walk around Lake Merritt before I went to the Coliseum, and that city is vibrant and has some of the most beautiful culture and eateries and art and every piece of that puzzle. I cannot wait, actually, to have my office back in Oakland, which is where it will be, and be spending more time there, too.

Q. Have you used the 360 technology in the practice facility yet, or will you bring your family in there to try it out? It's pretty fun.

JESS SMITH: I envision my family spending a decent amount of time there with some different take out dinners



and running my 2- and 4-year-old girls, telling them to do sprints on the court. I cannot wait to do that. I have not used it personally yet but I've heard incredible things.

Q. Prior to coming here, I had a chance to speak with Oakland high school female basketball players and their coach. They were super excited when I told them it's a female that's going to be the team president. What do you have to say to them; they are looking up at you?

JESS SMITH: First of all, thank you for looking up to me. That means a lot.

I was one of them at some point. So that's a little emotional for me to hear (tearing up) but what an honor, truly, to be able to build something that I hope they are incredibly proud of and to be somebody who they can hopefully eventually be as well.

Q. They told me when they look at you, they see the possibilities and not all of them are trying to be players. They want to get in the front office and there are not enough women in the front office. What would your advice be to them?

JESS SMITH: Well, first of all, I think my high school basketball skills, I know I had to switch to the front office, but I hope they come in handy at some point.

My advice is to ask yourself what's important to you and to always do what's right and not what's easy; to have tenacity in whatever it is that you would like to do and be the best at what you can control and what you want to do and if you do that and if you do that over and over again and you say yes to things in life's experience, it will lead you exactly where you're supposed to go.

Q. And you started with the Oakland A's like you said, right?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Yeah, the first professional sports organization that I had a chance to represent, and I remember walking on that field in the moment that that meant for me is somebody who comes from a small town in upstate New York who made it there. And at that point, I was selling tickets for the organization. I took that job incredibly seriously. Like every piece of an organization and every role, the collective is really what the result will become.

Q. Can you talk a little about the community initiatives that you started at Angel City and how much of that was part of your pitch to Brandon and Joe about not only leveraging sponsorship opportunities but also

making those communities connections immediately?

JESS SMITH: For sure. Angel City was launched at a really unique time, and I think having the opportunity to own the narrative of ensuring that women's sports were not viewed as a charity, and yet being something that is impact-driven was important to educate everyone about.

So as we thought about the business there, it's unique, right. It's formed from Natalie Portman and the Time's Up movement and what that meant, and you're building a business to rally around that and make big impact.

I think working in women's sports, in all sports, and the Warriors do an incredible job of this, too, you have to be hyper aware of what you can control from a systemic change, right. Part of the ability that we have as sports organizations is to drive that, specifically, for women, over 90 percent of women in leadership positions, we now know had access to sport at some time in their life.

Keeping those pieces in mind as we are building to make sure we are looking at diverse pipelines of talent in every facet of sport, that we are providing safe places to play and equipment to youth because it's transformative. That's the heart of what this organization does anyway.

So it was an incredible opportunity at Angel City to brand that a little bit differently and a little bit more rationally when we came to market, and I look forward to thinking through with this incredible team what there mean here.

Q. I remember you working with the A's many years ago. Speaking of which, if the A's are probably on their way out and looks like they are and the Raiders have already moved to Las Vegas, with the advent of your team coming and Bay FC; could you speak to the popularity of women's sports in the Bay Area and could those possibly be a nice fill-in for the two teams that left Oakland?

JESS SMITH: Candidly teams that left Oakland or not, these two incredible organizations Bay FC and this team will build something that's a legacy not just for women's sports but all sports. To build products to invite folks in to have an incredible game day experience is going to be incredibly important to us, so we look forward to being in that landscape besides Bay FC as well.

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