

LA Clippers Media Conference

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Kawhi Leonard

Press Conference

KAWHI LEONARD: Just to go back to February, it was great being around those guys. They've been in my shoes before. Got drafted, played their career, been through their prime, retired. Now they're doing things that they enjoy in their off time, either business, or if it's just personal things.

Me, I like to talk to older players, older coaches, just to get a perspective of what they're doing and trying to get my, say, retirement life together while I'm playing.

I just like to get knowledge and see what everyone has been through, and I feel like that helps me with my job, my career.

Q. You've also been very influential connecting the sports world with music with the projects that you've been doing with a lot of music artists. How impactful has that been for you and what are some of the projects you want to continue to work on to bridge those gaps and benefit the community, as well?

KAWHI LEONARD: You know, music has been very impactful for me, just growing up, my mom playing her music when I'm a child, and when I'm of age, able to play what I like in the household or in earphones, headphones.

It just gives me motivation to some of the lyrics that are being played. I know how to filter out the entertainment from things that I need to either drive me or motivate me to move forward.

As of now, I'm older; I had some time off with the injury. I was able to listen to more music and develop those projects with my team, ^ with /AOE some bull ding ^ check . But it's been fun. It's been fun to connect with artists, see their passion, see what else they're into when they're out of their craftsmanship and not working on music and see what they like or engage in, help them with their music.

I think that bridge is always there between professional players or music artists. People like to listen to music before the game or artists like to play sports.



It's been fun for me.

Q. How have you felt about how Lawrence Frank and the front office has rebuilt the team or kind of fit around you and PG?

KAWHI LEONARD: I think he's done a great job. We've got a lot of talented wings on our team that can play both ways, dribble, shoot the ball, be able to guard multiple positions, and I think that's what you need right now in this NBA, guys that can guard and just switch and be able to knock down open shots.

We'll see how it unfolds this year, but I'm excited. We've got training camp tomorrow.

Q. Going back to the NBA of '75, I had spoken to Dr. J during the off-season and he told me you were his favorite player in the NBA and he wanted to be kind of a mentor to you if that was something you'd be open to. I was wondering what your reaction is to that or if you'd had a conversation with him at all?

KAWHI LEONARD: Before you telling me that I've had conversations with him before, how he admired my game, who I was as an individual.

Yeah, I spoke to him at the All-Star Game. We connected, took pictures. I asked him about, like I said before, what he is into right now or how he spends his time. But you know, yeah, as time goes on, I feel like that relationship will get stronger.

And yeah, I mean, it's an honor for him to tell me that. He's one of the guys I looked up to or watched highlights of growing up, trying to pattern my game after him, how he uses the ball to manipulate the fingers, and just his drive to win. He won in the ABA, and he had that monkey on his back throughout the NBA, and he was able to win.

I just look at people's stories like that and try to interpret it into my own life. Hopefully the relationship can build.

Q. What was it like watching those guys battle, your teammates battle last year without you and PG, and how excited does that make you to come back and

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rejoin that group?

KAWHI LEONARD: It was amazing, especially with some of those comeback wins or some of those games where people thought they were for sure losses. They came in and fought hard and either strung out the game to be longer than what it was supposed to be or won the game.

It just shows their competitive nature, their mindset, that they didn't want to give up. They could have just laid down and burned the season, but without the play-in tournament, we would have made the Playoffs.

I think that shows who they are as individuals, and I think I could come in and help with that and help us win more games. PG is healthy, we've got John, so we've got to see how it all unfolds, like I said before.

Q. I was just wondering, it's been a while since we last talked to you. Thoughts on Norman Powell? He didn't play much last year, but showed flashes of being good. Robert Covington and John Wall, what are your thoughts on those additions to this team?

KAWHI LEONARD: I think Norm is good. He can play both ends of the floor. He's good at on-ball defense, definitely can shoot. He's improved his scoring, his passing since I played with him with the Raptors, and Covington just brings us another guy that can guard multiple positions and stretch that floor out for us.

John, all I can really go back is the two years when I seen him against us versus Houston. He was playing well. That's the last time I probably seen him in person in a live game action, other than the practices here. But he's been looking great.

Let's put it all on the floor and see what we can do. Like I said, we've got a lot of talent here, and I think we'll make something happen.

Q. We talked to Lawrence last week and he mentioned that your recovery is a step by step process and you guys are going to go through it together, this team and you. What step are you at right now in terms of how close you are to getting on the court in any form?

KAWHI LEONARD: I mean, plan is tomorrow to start training camp. For me individually, I'll be participating in training camp. Then from there, just seeing how my progression is, how I feel, what I'm not feeling, is it moving correctly, and just keep going from there, just gradually building up.

But right now I feel good, and the plan is to start camp

tomorrow and play.

Q. This is year four for you and PG since you guys joined forces. You guys couldn't have envisioned all the injuries you have, but how would you define how it's gone for you and PG and how big is this year for you two since this is now your fourth?

KAWHI LEONARD: Yeah, it seemed like it went by so fast with obviously the first year was the Kobe year, I would say. Nobody knew it was going to happen. Then going into the next season basically we were -- made it to the semifinals, I think, and then tore my ACL and then last year didn't play.

Now it's our fourth year. I feel like that -- me missing last year and that Kobe year kind of made time go by quick.

But I felt like over the years with us first being here you've seen a gradual improvement of the team, so hopefully we can take another step. That's all I can hope for really. This is our fourth year, so hopefully, like I said, we can have a shot at the semifinals or the Finals and try to make something happen.

Q. Are you bigger? Are you stronger?

KAWHI LEONARD: I feel stronger, yeah. I feel stronger for sure. It's been, what, 14, 15 months of no basketball -- well, playing in an NBA season for me, no basketball. That whole 13, 14-month process is just lifting, lifting weights and getting stronger.

I definitely got a lot stronger.

Q. Was there a chance you would have come back for the Playoffs last year had they gotten that far, or not?

KAWHI LEONARD: I mean, it's all woulda, coulda, shoulda right? But yeah, if they would have made it to The Finals last year, you would have seen me playing. (Laughter).

Q. How different will you be on the court?

KAWHI LEONARD: I'm not sure. Right now I feel good in my workouts, weightlifting. I don't feel like -- I would say I have a subconscious mind of not jumping off my leg per se. I feel good. We'll just see how the season goes.

And yeah, can't really tell you how that's going to work out.

Q. If there was one thing that you wanted your team to improve on this year, what would that one thing be? And also, how anxious are you to get back on the



court and to get back on where you can accomplish the things that so many people think you can?

KAWHI LEONARD: Just from watching last year, I felt like we had a lot of errors out of time-outs. I would say we just need to focus more and be smarter as a unit. I'm always going to say that.

I feel like our acuity needs to get a little bit better. I'm excited. I missed the whole year last year. Like I said, it's been 14 months of me just trying to better myself and just focus on my overall body.

Yeah, I'm excited. I'm tired of going through these rehab workouts and listening to doctors and trainers for the most part. Even though I'm still going to have to moving forward, but it'll be more basketball involved. That will help me.

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