

# WNBA Media Conference

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

## Cathy Engelbert

WNBA Commissioner



RON HOWARD: Thank you to our media for joining us. Once again, the WNBA's 24th season will take place in Bradenton, Florida, at IMG Academy, the Official Home of the 2020 WNBA season. Play tips off this Saturday with back-to-back days of tripleheader telecasts across ABC, ESPN and CBS Sports Network.

We're now going to turn it over to Commissioner Cathy Engelbert, who will make opening remarks. Then we'll open the floor to questions.

CATHY ENGELBERT: Thank you, Ron. Thank you for joining this call today.

I am here in Bradenton, Florida, at IMG Academy, as Ron said, the Official Home of our 2020 WNBA season. We're getting really excited as we get to tip this Saturday.

I want to thank you all for your ongoing coverage and patience as we finalize plans to get where we are today. As you all know, we were in huge planning and scenario-modeling mode for many months leading up to July 6 when we all came on campus, including myself.

Now that we're here, it's amazing to see the work playing out, seeing the players back on the court. IMG Academy, as I mentioned before, is a beautiful and vast campus, known for elite training of athletes, including professional athletes.

Whether it's watching a team practice or watching players ride their bikes around the campus, doing pool workouts led by team captains, you can feel the motivation and chemistry of the teams right now.

I will say it wasn't an easy process, but we're confident with the extensive health and safety protocols in place, a process for quickly triaging issues as they arise on-site. We're here, ready to go.

Obviously, I have a lot of people to thank for this season. AT&T for being our presenting partner for Tip-Off 2020. AT&T is also keeping our players connected while they're here by giving them a 5G device.

Our broadcast partners – ESPN, big shout-out to them.

CBS Sports Network. NBA TV, continued commitment and coverage. You know that was one of my focuses when I came in a year ago, to make sure we had more media coverage. From a broadcast perspective, we accomplished that for this season.

Avis rental cars has been a huge step up on partnering with the teams on much-needed minivan transportation for our teams. Kinsa thermometer has done a wonderful job by giving our players and staff a tool to monitor their own temperatures, use Bluetooth technology that gets reported every day. That was an important part of keeping our season as safe as possible.

We had Clorox really step up. The wipes are amazing and come in handy, as have their electrostatic sprayers. Anheuser-Busch has come through. Our other WNBA Changemakers, Deloitte and Nike, in addition to AT&T, making this season a success. Couldn't do it without these partners.

With the focus on soon-to-be play on the court, it's important for us to continue highlighting the strides we and the players are making in the social justice space. Engaging fans throughout the season on the issues most important to our players, this is a big part of the dedication for our players.

As we recently announced, the WNBA Justice Movement will be what we use as our driving force with the players leading the way. We've started the Social Justice Council and look forward to collectively amplifying these throughout the entire season here at IMG Academy, and seasons to come, because we know change does not come quickly.

We'll look for ways to engage and interact with our fans. As you know, they won't be in our arenas. We're going to need to do a lot of in-depth features of players, embracing the fact we're all together in one place. Get real-time features and content out to you through broadcast and other means.

Of course, you know I'm a huge advocate that we have tremendous momentum right now. We see some highly anticipated nationally televised matchups. We have veteran returns, new team dynamics after a very active free agency period. Of course, many amazing rookie debuts.



I do think this truly will be a season unlike any other. We're ready to tip-off on the 25th for our 24th season.

Thanks again for all the support you've given us during this very unusual time in the history of the league and quite frankly in the history of sports. These past few months have been challenging. It's all coming to fruition now.

I'm happy to take your questions. Thank you.

**Q. It seems when you first got down there, we've not heard any of the COVID testing numbers. Do you have any update what the COVID testing numbers are for the league now?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Sure. If there was something to report, we would report it out. Obviously, we're testing our players and our staff often. We had tested prior to players coming here. We had released those. If we had a story to tell, we would. Thankfully, we do not.

We have had only two players test positive when they got here. That was in the initial quarantine period. Once we've come out of quarantine, we've had no other players test positive.

We'll report out if there's some significant story there. Knock on wood every day, but now things are stable here. No positive tests since we came out of quarantine a couple weeks ago.

**Q. With no tests being positive, wouldn't that be something you would want out there? Other leagues are saying there's no positives, no positives, one positive. Wouldn't you want that information out there as a story that the bubble is working?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, sure. I had this media today. We knew you would ask. We're happy to put that out. It's just we're really focused on the social justice platform, keeping everyone safe and healthy. Sure, we can do that periodically if that's helpful.

**Q. The players have been in social justice initiatives for years, but yet one of the co-owners is making a big deal about them focusing on that. Can you talk about the council, your involvement with that, and your players being so dedicated focusing on these issues this season.**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I mean, obviously everybody is aware, hopefully you saw my comments last week on CNN, when I was asked about Senator Loeffler, who is co-owner of the Atlanta Dream. I was surprised to receive

the letter from Kelly. From the short time I've known her, even seeing public statements prior to me joining the league, she's been very supportive of women's issues, women's empowerment, has been interested in their players and what they stand for. Having played basketball herself, she wanted to help grow and support the league.

Again, not sure what all is at bay here. I've been so proud of the WNBA players who, as you said in the latter part of your question, have always been at the forefront of social movements. A lot of people didn't know that coming into these recent events.

I've been talking about this since the day I walked in the door last July, how impressed I was. I quite frankly wasn't that focused on how they were using their platforms to vigorously advocate for the things that matter most to them. You just have to look at Maya Moore, what she was able to accomplish from a criminal justice system reform perspective. You look at Natasha Cloud, some of our players who opted out to focus on social justice.

More importantly, the players that are here and the Social Justice Council we formed with the players and the Players Association, already so many great ideas coming out of that. So proud of them as they go forward that they're not being distracted by politics or other things. They're really focused, and quite frankly excited to be together.

They're energized. That's probably the best word to make their voices heard and make lasting change in this country because that is what they are here for. It is bigger than basketball right now for them. There's tremendous momentum for their voices to be heard.

**Q. Back to the COVID numbers. More broadly, since the last week you've heard encouraging results for the NBA and Major League Soccer. You look at those numbers, your own numbers, what have you learned, especially over the last five to seven days? What has that initial information helped you understand as you refine your protocols trying to keep your numbers as low as well?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I think the really interesting part is so far the plan and protocols are working. Wearing masks, washing hands, daily temperature checks, daily symptom checks, making sure we're rooting out any issues. Kind of what we did with an initial quarantine period, then an initial kind of team-only period, now moving into scrimmages and games this weekend.

You really have to follow the science. We have done an enormous amount of work on understanding data and the science, obviously consulting with specialists. That's why

these were so stringent. You probably heard complaints early on here because we were really stringent, having developed these health and safety protocols in consultation with these public health medical experts.

Nobody loves wearing masks, but masks are required other than on the court. Physical distancing. Really important part of it, too, and hard to do, required as well. Having designated areas exclusive to the WNBA. Temperature checks, symptom checks, following up with somebody not doing them.

Those are the types of things we consistently communicated on the first week let's say until 14 days. Now we're past that period of time. I think players and staff are feeling good.

You really have to continue to just trust the science. I know that's sometimes hard to do. We're showing that if you follow the science, you follow the protocols, you can remain stable in this very uncertain environment.

**Q. Are there any policies in place that if a player leaves the bubble without permission inadvertently? Warnings, fines? What kind of medical protocol would they have to go through? What if someone gets really sick? Where do they go? Local hospitals? What are their options?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: If someone leaves for unauthorized reasons, obviously there will be significant ramifications of that, including that they may not be able to come back for the season.

Certainly for authorized reasons, family and medical emergencies, things like that, that's permitted with advance notice. There will be a quarantine when they come back in because they will be back outside of the confined site that we have here. There will be a quarantine period of seven to 10 days when they come back.

So far, we haven't had anyone. Knock on wood – every time I talk about this, I say that with regard to testing. We have not had any unauthorized exits. You're permitted to leave at any time. It's the coming back that's a challenge to make sure we have the proper quarantine period and testing period both before you get on the plane to come here or in the car as well as when you get here on campus. I think we've got that pretty well nailed down.

Thankfully, the positive tests we've had have not been symptomatic or anything serious. We have relationships now with the local hospitals. In the area in Manatee County, I've talked with the public health officials in the county. We are all set.

We have a whole team of physicians on staff here, on-site, inside the contained site, who are working with players for a variety of things, not just COVID, but a variety of medical issues, sports medicine and other things you would think we would need during a time when people are going to be here for three months or so.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Elena Delle Donne. Specifically, she put out an open letter last week saying that both the decision by the league's panel and also the way in which it was conveyed had left her hurting a lot about it. In retrospect, any regrets about the way it happened? If you have reached out, what are your thoughts about repairing the relationship with someone who is obviously one of the most prominent players in the WNBA?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Let me give you some context. Obviously, we're sensitive to her health and support her. What we've been trying to do throughout setting up this whole season is to follow the science of the virus, consult with infectious disease specialists, epidemiologists.

The virus is very complicated. We had to put in a process that we worked out collectively with the Players Association to create a level playing field for all WNBA players so everyone is treated fairly. Independent medical review panel, including specialists.

The level of player is not a factor when making those decisions. As you know, separately the Mystics confirmed that because of Elena's recent back surgery, she was not going to be required to report to Florida, and will receive her full pay. The pandemic has disrupted her back rehab, as it has many of the non-essential type things that we're doing during the height of COVID. There were a lot of things that were disrupted by the pandemic back March through July here.

Absolutely highly respect Elena. Great player in our league. Her level of play was not a factor. It's an independent medical review process with infectious disease specialists that were reviewing her and other cases as well for us. That's why it's called independent. It was an independent medical review panel.

It is unfortunate that the reaction was what it was, but we are sensitive certainly to her health and support her all the way here.

**Q. In light of everything that's going on in the country right now, playing in front of the nation that's hungry for sports, do you see some advantages of the league now getting exposure that it's always wanted on**

## television?

CATHY ENGELBERT: I really do. Part of the strategy when I came in about a year ago was to broaden the exposure to these elite women athletes. When you look at the statistics of less than 4 percent of all sports coverage covers women's sports, I felt that if we could put in a strategy and move that numerator just a few percentage points, the denominator is huge because there's huge coverage of sports.

Who knew we were going to have this global health pandemic creating an economic strain on our financial systems. If you look at any crisis, the weaknesses you had going into the crisis tend to be amplified. But you also look at that crisis as an opportunity to maybe fix those weaknesses.

I think the weakness around the coverage of women's sports, the eyes on women's sports, sure, this is a huge opportunity for us and for the league and for these players really to show everyone the elite athletes that they are. That's why now that we've been through a couple weeks of training camp, I'm very excited to get to Saturday, to tip off our season this year so we can get more eyes on us, start executing the strategy we started pre-pandemic, which was to broaden the appeal, the fan base, bring in new revenue and ultimately grow the game and grow the fan base. That is exactly what we are going to try to do.

The pandemic sets you back, but also as you describe in your questions, it's an opportunity for us. We have to take advantage of that opportunity. That's why everything was so carefully planned out, scenario-planned here, so that we could put on a season, a successful season, while making sure health and safety were number one.

**Q. Would it be safe to say that the WNBA, which was founded in 1997, was way ahead of its time when it came to causes of social justice, giving women a chance to play professional basketball? Isn't that a statement itself about the league?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah. I've been reflecting a lot on this this year. David Stern, who was part of launching the league, died on January 1 of this year. It's not lost on me that 2020 has turned out to be a huge challenge for all sports. After David, Kobe Bryant went down with those young girl basketball players, their parents. Now we hit this pandemic.

The WNBA players were definitely ahead of their time. I think the NBA was ahead of their time in launching the league. I think the players were then ahead of their time with their social justice platforms as, again, indicated by the

Maya Moores and Natasha Clouds out there, courageous voices around social justice.

**Q. We always talk about momentum. Is there concern that Kelly Loeffler's words, since they directly kind of contradict what this league is about, if that will affect the momentum? Also, separately, some of the players are sitting out for a variety of reasons. Is there any worry that that might have an effect on the momentum and the growth that we've been talking about?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I think your two questions are intermingled, so I'll answer them all at once.

As commissioner, I'm committed to making sure that this season is dedicated to the players' platform that vigorously advocates for social justice, to make sure Black Lives Matter. We're proud of our players for speaking out on these issues. They have always led and will continue to do so. There's nothing political about that. It's a statement of their values.

I think they're bringing awareness to issues that have long been ignored, particularly as they advocate for #sayhername, for female victims of racial injustice and police brutality. I think that's an important voice to be heard. They're uniquely positioned as a league of huge diversity, 80 percent black women, and more even diverse than that.

I've been counseling the players to make sure that that is what they're focused and energized by, not to get caught up in a lot of the other elements of the divisive society we live in. They can be the voice, especially in this season of cultivating community conversations, roundtables, player-produced podcasts, other activations that address this country's long history of inequality and implicit bias that has targeted their communities.

There's no better time to do that than to be tipping off our season this weekend. Their uniforms will display Breonna Taylor's name, the Louisville victim of police injustice. That's going to be a huge statement by these women. A variety of other forgotten victims that they're going to continue to carry.

No, I definitely don't think it takes away from the momentum. I'd be betting on the WNBA players right now that they're going to be successful in getting their voice heard.

**Q. On testing, how many days has it been since the last positive test? Do you have a sense of approximately how many tests were conducted in the recent testing period?**



CATHY ENGELBERT: I don't have the exact number. We started testing before they even flew here. Since we got here, that was July 6, 11 out of the 12 teams came on July 6. They had a four-day quarantine period. That would probably make the last positive test, because there were only two, like July 8th, I guess. Maybe it's the 9th. It was in that initial quarantine period.

Again, we've done tests, if you figure we have 140 players plus staff, each day in that period since July 6. We can probably get you some of that math.

What I'm focused on day by day, because the science would show that if you can identify any COVID positive, get them in isolation, you're getting them before they're infectious. That's what the science is showing. You get them into isolation, whether they're symptomatic or asymptomatic. Obviously, keeping them in isolation under the CDC guidelines and under the close watch of our medical team.

**Q. Can you clarify in terms of personnel, will all game-day personnel be only at (indiscernible)? Does that include referees? Do they not go into the bubble? Scorers, the people there for game, will they only interact with the players there and not be at the bubble? Do you have any concerns if teams that may have a rash of injuries, of teams being shorthanded because of how long it would take somebody to be able to come into the bubble at this point?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Our officials, our referees, will be in the so-called bubble, using that word that I know everybody else is. Affectionately called the Wubble by the players, which I do like. Yes, the referees are absolutely within the bubble. So that's that.

We've tiered, as they have across the way in Orlando, certain people who will be at broadcast who will not be at any time within 10 feet of any player. We've got plexiglas, other barriers for that set of people. Those are still subject to testing, but they're not staying inside the IMG campus. That's important. But the referees are inside.

On the injuries, injuries or COVID, whatever a player may be taken out for, we're certainly monitoring. We had a few before they got here, two since we got here. I think we have the roster hardship available. We have a cap hardship.

We also do have protocols that we're not going to relax if someone needs to rush a player in. They will have to serve that seven-day quarantine upon arrival here and be tested before they get on the plane. It could be seven to

10 days before a player could get up and running should a player need that.

I think coaches and GMs are figuring all that out as they have been evaluating their rosters in general. Again, we do have the roster hardship. That's one player out for at least 10 games, second out for at least four. You get another roster spot without having to waive anybody.

Then there's obviously the cap hardship if you fall below 10 players. We have a lead time. I think everyone now understands that. We can't jeopardize the health and safety of everyone here to lessen that quarantine period.

**Q. There are a few players who aren't in the bubble yet. If they come back, some of these players who have been signed with emergency hardships might have to be off the roster. Any talk about if players have to go out of a roster due to limits, you could keep them in quarantine in the bubble in case other teams are in need of extra players?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: We'll certainly consider those. And there's only one or two, I believe, that have come in. We're going to consider when another player from the team comes in and they either get waived – the fact that that player is already clean and in the bubble. Have to talk to the player. It would be at their option, of course, if they'd like to stay here, work out as a potential replacement player. That would be ideal. We're certainly considering that and talking to teams about that.

**Q. The independent medical panel, are they done making all of their decisions now? Are they disbanded? Are there still decisions on availability left to come?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I believe at least for WNBA players their work is done. I don't think they're ever disbanded because we constantly consult with infectious disease specialists throughout the season.

If a replacement player who hasn't been through the medical history questionnaire has to be put forth in front of a panel after review by the team physician, yeah, we would have to submit someone.

For now, at least for the population we have here, for those coming here that have been cleared to play, I believe their work is done. That doesn't mean they won't be reconvened for some replacement player that needs further evaluation.

**Q. You mentioned in your intro to the Changemakers program, which I know was a big part of the CBA, what**

**you've been trying to do on the business side since taking over. What is the status of who is a part of that group? What types of ways has that partnership been activated, nurtured through this season from afar?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: You may recall it was absolutely a platform we announced back coming off the Collective Bargaining Agreement in January with three inaugural Changemakers: AT&T, Nike and Deloitte. We've obviously been continuing to activate their own platform sponsorship.

As I mentioned, AT&T, what they did for the players to keep them connected with the 5G device. They'll continue to provide resources. The others as well – Nike, with warmup shirts that will say "Say Her Name" on the back of them, that will be debuting this weekend.

We're just excited to have launched those three inaugural Changemakers. We're working again on that platform as we go forward. Now, that is something where the pandemic has disrupted that because we went from a virtual draft on April 17 very hard into the scenario planning to put a season on this year.

Now that we're going to tip off, I think we'll get back and have a call to action for others to step up. While we signed partners since the CBA, we're looking for significant partners at the Changemaker level to really support the league. I think we'll be successful in doing that going forward.

We have to get a season started. As you know, we were supposed to start in mid-May. Now we're toward the end of July almost. We will continue the great work about driving more revenue into the league, sponsors and partners.

That's why the coverage is so important, so there's a call to action to support these elite women when they see them on the number of national broadcasts we have this year and their platform. I think it's going to be a pretty significant way to get the interest in the league, to grow the fan base, to bring in more sponsors.

**Q. You were mentioning learning a lot of the different data. It seems like every day we get different data reports, case numbers, positive cases, whatever. What have you personally learned, what has the league kind of learned on how to process that data every day, what's important, what's not?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I've learned, an incredible amount about the data and the science. I'm pretty convinced now that after being here now into our third week, if you follow the science, you follow the protocols, that is the best way

to keep everyone safe.

Again, it seems simple, but all the public service announcements that first came out around COVID – washing hands, wearing masks, daily temperature checks, daily symptom checks, certainly testing. Those five pillars are important. Those give you the data and the science.

Ultimately, for the layperson like myself – though I did work for a pediatrician through high school and college, I have a little more interest in the medical side and science. It's been fascinating to read. Any time a question gets asked, even though we have physicians answering, I still do my own research, take a look at the CDC website. I've been to the site a hundred times over the past weeks to make sure I understand the difference between isolation time, quarantine time, the differences in tests, PCR test, antigen test versus an antibody test. Making sure we're as educated as we can be, and I as the commissioner, but also that we're seeking the right specialization when we need it.

**Q. Regarding staffing numbers. With each team being able to bring eight staffers to Bradenton, a lot of teams had to make tough decisions. Now that players are practicing, we're kind of getting closer to games starting, have you heard about players and coaches and that help staff about that limited number? Any fears about that limited number?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yes, certainly in the lead-up that was something we talked extensively with the players, with the teams, with the coaching staff about. We did expand the number of people they could bring per team.

We also highly recommended they really look at an additional spot within the expanded number to bring, whether it was a massage therapist or physical therapist, an assistant athletic trainer. We very much recommended how important we felt that was if we're going to have, number one, prioritizing health and safety of our players and staff. Obviously, from the league perspective, that was very COVID driven. We need that also on the sports medicine side.

I think we ended up in a good place, have sufficient resources. We're continually evaluating that, making sure that's what we have available to our players.

**Q. My name is Pepper. I'm a nine-year-old journalist and I am a big fan of the WNBA. I created my own show and podcast called Dish with Pepper. My question is this: How do you bring more fans to the WNBA when they can't physically be at the games?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Pepper, it's great to hear your voice. Great to hear you as a next-generation leader. What a fabulous question about how do you bring fans and attention when there will be no fans in the seats.

I think this is an area, if you were listening earlier, we talked about how to engage fans when they're in a virtual environment. We're working on it very hard. We're going to pilot some things, hope to have some things stick for next year if we can get fans back in our seats.

This is about telling the story, getting the coverage, building rivalries. The personalities are there. I assure you now that I've been here almost three weeks with these players, the personalities are showing through. I think the storylines are here, the rivalries are here. The veterans, the rookies, everyone in between.

It's going to be an exciting season. We have to find ways to market the players in a more robust way among a broad set of media outlets. I am thankful to everyone on this call for your interest. Certainly our broadcast partners as well as our social media platforms.

We need to find ways to market. That's why we need a call to action around more sponsors so we have more funding to market ourselves more broadly. That's all part of the strategy and transformation we're undergoing.

Great question. Thank you for calling in today.

**Q. We've noticed not just throughout sports but all industries that the pandemic is shaking up business as usual. As sportswriters, sports fans, I imagine we all can agree we would love to be in an environment covering women's basketball when all of the teams are present at once. Harkening to the summer AAU basketball days. Should the Wubble work the way that you envision, have you contemplated having tournament-style basketball in the future where you're bringing all the teams together and allowing fans to engage in the WNBA in that fashion?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: It's actually a great observation, I'll call it, because I do think we're going to learn some things from bringing everyone together. Hopefully, the next time we have to do it, it isn't because of a global health pandemic, not being able to have fans.

As you may know, as part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, one of the things the players gave us an idea on around lifestyle, bigger than just basketball, is to have something we were calling like a Baller Fest, a Ball-chella event during the season next year.

It was always going to be the 2021 season, which is our 25th silver anniversary season, to have a fusion of lifestyle and food and art and music and basketball. Bring everyone together to really, again, draw a broader fan base in to start following our players more broadly than just during the regular part of the competitive season. Maybe we could even pilot different formats of doing a 3-v-3 type format, things like that.

Absolutely, it was already in the plan. Obviously, next year, now that the Olympics have been deferred, we'll see how everything fits. We were going to do a Commissioner's Cup tournament this year, designate those games. That obviously has been deferred into next year. A lot to think about.

I think it's great that you're kind of putting that back at the top of my to-do list because that was certainly something we're working on even throughout the scenario planning for this season.

When we get to next season, we have Olympics. Hopefully, we'll have an All-Star Game, a Baller Fest, a Commissioner's Cup. That will integrate into the plan of how to more broadly market our players as an important part of it.

**Q. In the short term has anyone in the Wubble had to leave for some of the medical care you referred to, some of the things that are available on campus? I'm wondering if anyone has had to leave yet for the inevitable basketball injury that happens. X-ray, MRI? What is the policy for keeping the Wubble around them in a case with a relatively minor injury, where they're able to get back to playing soon? My other question is, obviously you have the new CBA, the salary cap increases and whatnot, you talked about the Changemakers program, the expectations for enhanced revenue through 2027. A lot has changed in our economy since then. How are you feeling about that in 2021, 2022 and beyond?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: In your first question, I assume you are thinking X-ray, MRI, that kind of thing. We have set up a clean corridor with our medical staff, the local diagnostic center. There's actually one attached within IMG Academy. Then if we need to use a hospital capability, we do have some of that capability on campus in the bubble as well as a clean corridor we've worked out ahead of time with our local team and medical capabilities. Again, mask wearing, physical distancing, all that stuff is all part of that clean corridor as well.

Your long-term question, really good question, one we have not lost sight of: what we need to do as part of the

transformation into '21 and '22. While I'd like to say the pandemic didn't disrupt any of it, it did. I think we'll use the rest of the season into the offseason to really work hard on what we can bring to life in '21, in an Olympic year, with an All-Star Game, as I mentioned, hopefully a Commissioner's Cup as well as some kind of Baller Festival.

**Q. Obviously, the CBA you put together, the salary cap increases and whatnot, you talked about the Changemakers program, the expectations for enhanced revenue through 2027. A lot has changed in our economy since then. How are you feeling about that in 2021, 2022 and beyond?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Really good question, one we have not lost sight of: what we need to do as part of the transformation into '21 and '22. While I'd like to say the pandemic didn't disrupt any of it, it did. I think we'll use the rest of the season into the offseason to really work hard on what we can bring to life in '21, in an Olympic year, with an All-Star Game, as I mentioned, hopefully a Commissioner's Cup as well as some kind of Baller Festival.

Then into '22 and beyond, we'll also have a FIBA World Cup in there, then the Olympics before we know it again. Constantly looking at how our schedule plays out, what kind of assets we can build, how we can grow the value of our franchises. Down the road, we look at expansion. Those are all on the list, all things top of mind for me had we had a normal season this year. Obviously, my focus shifted very quickly after the draft to help with the safety protocols.

Now I see with the tip this Saturday coming out of that, really working hard on how we significantly drive the league forward and the growth of the league for 2021 and beyond. We have this opportunity, too, around marketing the league in the 25th season, the only women's professional sports league in the U.S. to be hitting the silver anniversary. I think we'll do a fair amount of marketing around that, which was all part of our plan. League marketing agreements, team marketing agreements to drive, again, more recognition, more household name, more rivalries as we grow the league over the next three, four years.

**Q. (Question about the medical evaluation of players whose health status in terms of participation was to be determined by a medical panel convened jointly by the WNBA and the Players Association.)**

CATHY ENGELBERT: We had a process where everyone, not just the players, but everyone involved that was going to be coming to Bradenton would be involved in a medical history questionnaire that then would be

evaluated and reviewed by their team physician. The team physician would either clear the player or clear the staff member for travel, or refer it to the league.

Those were the ones, it was a small amount, that would then be evaluated by a panel of infectious disease specialists, depending on what the complication was in the medical history questionnaire noted by the team physician. That was the process of evaluations.

**Q. Given what you've been saying, the positive things you've been saying about how the protocols are working, how confident are you that you're going to be able to complete the entire season all the way through the playoffs? Also, the NWSL, the ownership group that was formed for the new L.A. team, do you see that might be something that might be applicable to the WNBA?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I am very confident that if we follow the protocols and the science, we will have a successful season leading into the playoffs in September, culminating in the Finals in October. Again, I'm not superstitious, but the more I talk about how well things are going, I do get a little nervous. But I'm very confident right now.

Regarding the NWSL, I think it's great. I did read that in earnest yesterday. The growth of all women's sports is a good thing. When I took this job, I said part of my job also is to think more broadly about women's sports.

Girls, as they enter the teens and preteen years, are dropping out [of sports]. I was a huge beneficiary of Title IX, a huge beneficiary of the confidence that sports built in me when I went to college and played two Division I sports.

We would love those type of ownership groups to be interested in the WNBA as well. It's a model we've been looking at with female ownership groups, diverse ownership groups. It's something we continue to look at when we think about growing our franchise values and, down the road, look at expansion.

**Q. This question comes from South Africa. Does the WNBA have plans to grow the following of the league in different markets like in Africa in particular?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: It's a great question. Obviously, part of what we want to do is grow women's sports in the U.S., but also there is a lot of interest outside the U.S. in our game. I think these players can be huge role models for young girls and boys, young women and men, in other countries as well.

While we're very focused today on transforming the league





here in the United States – we need to drive more coverage, more sponsorships here – we have an interest in those that want to invest in our league outside the United States.

Would look clearly at a call to action around that, too, to start doing some analysis of the interest in women's basketball, women's professional basketball, our elite players around the world. Many of our players play all around the world in our offseason, but certainly also bringing our game outside the U.S. is definitely something that we have on the list.

I would say, again, the pandemic probably delayed that until next year. There were some things we were thinking about for this year, a preseason game, that kind of thing. Over the next year or two, it's something we'll start looking at.

**Q. Could you talk a little bit about the longevity of the Social Justice Council. What plans does the league have to support and provide resources to this council for years to come? What are some of the initiatives out of the council that you can preview or tease for us besides what's going to be on the court and the jerseys?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I think this is something that's here to stay. We are, I would say, maturing the council that has been meeting a few times already since we've gotten here to Florida. I think they already have some amazing ideas.

I know there's some community conversation, even one going on this evening, that we're excited about. I actually have a meeting tonight with a subset of the player group at 6:00 to get a readout of some of the things they've been thinking.

Again, I'd say we've graduated from the infancy stage into the toddler stage. This is something I believe will be here to stay for probably the next few years. I think the players are trying to brainstorm, with the advice of their outside advisers as well, as to how their voice can be amplified the most, how they can effect change, what social justice areas they want to effect change. Is it voting rights? Is it criminal justice reform? Other areas of social justice? Certainly it's around racial injustice, police brutality, that kind of thing.

Until I get more of a readout, I can't give you the exact initiatives. I can tell you, from what I've listened in on so far, they're being very creative in the way they're thinking, very different in the way they're thinking.

We all know to get change in this country around these

issues, we have to think differently. I've also been advising them, sometimes things might seem counterintuitive to what you should do. You have to be patient because this is a strategy that can't be all short term because we know change is hard and we need the right culture to drive the change. I think they're feeling right now that their voices can be amplified around driving this change.

It's hard to change culture. I've advised them that culture takes sometimes a long time. This cannot be a one-and-done this year. But this year is dedicated to it. The Social Justice Council, the outside advisers, will drive what they're doing. This is something that's not going to go away.

Again, I just can't stress enough how much this is not new to these players. They've been advocating for a long time. It's just new to a lot of other people.

**Q. Do you have any sort of anonymous tip line that we read so much about from the NBA bubble in terms of tracking any outside movement? The Delle Donne situation, some of the way all that was done, the part where she wrote how the league panel of doctors without anyone speaking to me or either of my doctors informed me they were denying the request. It did bring a lot of criticism and negative publicity, something we're still talking about. Is that just the way it was set up, that they didn't have to communicate directly with the player in question or examine them? Do you wish you could have had any kind of do-over in that situation?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Again, obviously as with any medical issues, those are confidential under HIPAA between medical professionals. I can't comment specifically on what doctors talked to what other doctors. I know there were discussions between physicians and a nurse practitioner.

Again, it's a confidential process, confidential for all of those that were considered by the panel. It's a confidential medical procedure protected by HIPAA. I cannot have any interaction with that process. As I said, nor would the level of the player be a factor or anything like that.

Your question on the tip line, I think given the size and scale of what you're hearing from other leagues, having to have a tip line, kind of confined campus here at IMG Academy, we don't have an official tip line. But we do follow up on any observations.

We've asked the IMG Academy staff as well as our teams to be very honest, to let us know if they're hearing or seeing anything not in compliance with our protocols. As

soon as we get any information, we investigate it and follow up and take the appropriate action, send the appropriate reminders out.

Most of it's like how important it is to wear a mask at all times except on the court. Again, making sure we're following the protocols, making sure we're getting tested, the daily temperature checks and symptom checks.

Our size and scale, we didn't need an official hotline or tip line. We certainly are receiving indications and we're following up with them immediately. With the teams, we've assigned a central team contact for any things we need to get done at the team level. It's working pretty well right now.

RON HOWARD: Thank you very much, Cathy. Thank you to our media for joining us this afternoon. Be sure to tune in and cover on Saturday and Sunday when we tip it off.