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Cathy Engelbert

Media Availability

CATHY ENGELBERT: Hello, everyone. We've been obviously spending the good part of the last 48 hours evaluating the plan for tonight's game and forward. Obviously, you all know how complex this virus is, how unpredictable it is, and as we sat here and tried to evaluate all the tools and data that we have, we feel very good about having Seattle and Minnesota play tonight in Game 1. We're awaiting one remaining test. That's the way this works; every day you get tested and some come back sooner than others. But we felt it appropriate, given it was game day, to tell you and tell all our fans and teams that we're a go.

I'm happy to answer any questions. We are constantly monitoring it. One thing that some of you have heard me say probably is that with all the challenges we've had this year, this virus is, again, one that every day gets reset to zero. Even as I speak now, we could be getting results back that throw something else out of kilter that has nothing to do with what happened Sunday. We evaluate each one based on the facts and circumstances at the time and consult with experts. I'm so blessed to have experts available to us on the infectious disease and epidemiology side. That's what we've done here over the past 48 hours to return to play.

Q. Commissioner, could you sort of explain maybe what the difference is -- from what we understood there are multiple inconclusive tests, and I know you addressed this earlier, but if you could go over what the difference is between that and the circumstances we had during the regular season where a player got an inconclusive test and she sat out while her team played? What was the difference in this scenario?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Right, good question, thanks. Every one of these is different, and every one you have to evaluate. It's not just an inconclusive. You get data from that inconclusive, like the cycle threshold count, which would be very different for different tests and different individuals. Every one of them is different. Obviously, the main difference here, certainly there were multiple. Then as we started to look at the data we got real time as Seattle was boarding the bus on Sunday, when you have multiple

players, you have to determine what's going on here. Is there an infection or exposure that might spread through the campus? By putting them on the court would you risk that, especially against another team? Was it just this team? So really the difference primarily was the multiple. But I will say every case is different. It's not just positive/negative/inconclusive/indeterminate, which are all terms that get thrown out when we get tests back. Really this case was the data that we were getting and the multiple players.

Q. I wanted to actually follow up on that, and I'm curious, for how many players for the Seattle Storm were the tests inconclusive? I know there were multiple, but I'm just wondering how many players had to go through extensive COVID protocol before getting approved to return.

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, I will tell you that, again, we treated the entire team as the extent of testing, But there were three players on Sunday. So that's the multiple. But again, they all had different fact patterns. They weren't all the same. We evaluate each separately. But they happen to be on the same team, so we wanted to make sure there was no infection or exposure that was being spread amongst the team and therefore the campus and the bubble. They were all different, but again, there were three.

Q. I'm curious from the standpoint of what if they had not gotten these tests back today and they were inconclusive, would you guys have postponed again? What's the protocol for you guys as far as going forward and playing games or not playing games?

CATHY ENGELBERT: I think in consultation with our infectious disease and player health and safety experts, we would have evaluated it and determined -- first, it's about is it healthy and safe for everyone involved in the games tonight to play. If we got past that hurdle and it was down to one or two or even the three players the second time and we didn't feel there was community spread and we felt we had enough testing from the remaining people on campus, we have four teams plus team staff left on campus and league personnel, then we would make a decision based on the view of the specialists that we're consulting with. What's the view on have we had enough time and testing to determine that there's little risk -- there's



never no risk with COVID, but little risk and that we believed that there wasn't infection or there wasn't exposure that was spreading throughout the campus. If those were the criteria, then we'd play tonight even if one or multiple players could not take the court. We would have to feel comfortable that it was safe for everybody involved in putting on the game, not just those on the court but everybody.

Q. I'm just curious, you guys are doing hundreds of tests every day for the players and people in the bubble. Three inconclusives for Seattle. Do you have any idea through the regular season how many total inconclusive tests were returned just in all of the testing?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, we did not have many. We would get them periodically one-off. We have a variety of tools at our disposal for testing. We've used the saliva test. We've used nasal swabs paired with an oral swab. We've used other rapid, non-rapid. We have different technologies running these tests as well. Again, we evaluate the clinical output that we get from all the tests, and obviously for those that we decide are inconclusive based on a clinical decision, the lab reports out a result and then we evaluate them from a clinical perspective. We did not have that many, which again, is why as we were evaluating on Sunday morning, or Sunday early afternoon in real time, as we were getting ready to tip off Game 1 and then have Game 2. We were evaluating this very closely because we hadn't had multiple people on one day. That's why, again, we consulted and made a decision to postpone the game. But we had not had a lot of experience [with multiple people on one day], and as you know, because it was public, three players on three different teams at three different times, calling them one offs, they did miss a game as we waited for that second test 24 hours apart from the other. But again, everything is a timing of when that test result comes in and then you have to return those two negatives 24 hours apart.

Q. Is that why you changed the time of the games tonight, giving the Lynx and Storm the later slot so you have more time to come to a decision?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, and it wasn't so much a decision as just have all the data that we could to make sure that there was not an infection or exposure that was spreading throughout the campus for anybody. It actually wasn't -- we made that decision -- actually we were advised by the infectious disease specialists to make that decision so that we had all the data we could possibly have and enough time to evaluate all the data on tests for all the four teams to ensure, but obviously we were focused on Seattle specifically because of the issues we had on

Sunday. But we also needed to do some contact tracing and we needed to ensure the integrity of the bubble. That's what we've done here. I think we made the right decision Sunday, and I think we're making the right decision tonight. But as I said, every day is a new day in COVID world and you go back to ground zero.

But that was not made to specifically clear a specific player. It was made to ensure that we had enough time, because the way the virus presents itself, sometimes within 36 to 48 hours of exposure you needed enough time to determine that all the testing we've done is coming back negative and that you can have a game.

Q. Two mostly logistical questions: Given that everyone has now been cleared, is there any theory as to why this happened? And also, just the fact that Seattle had a bye or an exemption from playing anyone else the last week, did that help, not by design but to keep there from being interactions with other teams that would have complicated your decision tree?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Again, as for a theory on why this happened, I think you all know that COVID-19 testing is complex. Again, as I said, every test is different. Day after day, you reset to zero. You get a new round of tests with new data. The theory that if it's positive or negative, it's that binary -- it's not the way it works. There's data that you get around cycle thresholds and you can literally think about how many different permutations you have to have of that. To the theory why it happened, we do not have a theory around that. We did do extensive contact tracing.

To your point, Seattle hadn't played since the prior Sunday. They hadn't gone off campus. They hadn't gone anywhere. So as we did the contact tracing, we were trying to figure out was there a reason why the virus was at least presenting itself in an inconclusive way in some of these tests. The good news was there was nothing that we could point to to say there's an outsider, or there was something that permeated the bubble or didn't uphold the integrity of the bubble. So that's good news.

Contact tracing is really important when you have these things. Obviously, the additional testing and the extensive testing we did thereafter was important as well. But theories with COVID, I'm never going to speculate. Based on the information we had at the time on Sunday at 1:00-ish, I think we made the right decision to postpone.

Q. Kind of to maybe follow up on that, do you think that the transfer of location to the hotel rather than IMG Academy might have had anything to do with what happened? And then is the WNBA taking any extra precautions to disinfect or clean any new areas or

quarantine people or anything like that?

CATHY ENGELBERT: I don't know what you mean transfer location. I mean, we have a contained area which are WNBA-only areas within IMG Academy's campus. There's no kind of transfer of location or anything like that. The hotel is on the campus, so there was no transfer. Obviously, the hotel has become the hub for everything there. Then there's the practice courts, which are another hub. Then what we call the broadcast court -- another. But yeah, I do not think that had anything to do with it, and we continue to use our electrostatic sprayers to disinfect everything.

We did review, as far as contact tracing, all of those cleaning procedures to ensure they were all happening as they were supposed to be happening, the places they were supposed to be happening. Again, we just continue to ask questions related to all of that. But we have not found anything that wasn't following exactly what we've been following since day one, July 6, when we all arrived here.

Q. The previous press release today had said one player was still awaiting another negative. Do you know if Seattle will have full strength tonight?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yes, we're expecting the final result at some point -- hopefully that second negative at some point this afternoon. It's about 3:18; I think shortly, I'll say. We do expect to know for sure whether that player will be able to take the court or requires further evaluation.

Q. Another kind of logistical question. There are players who are allowed to have an additional guest come on to the campus. If so, what's the procedure or protocol for that? And also, have there been any modifications with the main point of the medical protocol over the summer, especially now with the onset of the series?

CATHY ENGELBERT: As far as guests, as many of you know, we allowed moms to bring their children and a caregiver at the onset. We allowed it at a capped level because we wanted to make sure the size and scale of our operation here. We did allow guests from day one. So, unlike some of the other sports that only allowed during the playoffs, we already allowed guests on day one, including moms with children.

As far as modifications, I would say obviously as the science has evolved and we continue to update our medical protocol if we get additional tools and things like that, we've made modifications. But we've pretty much stuck with the main health and safety protocols that we put out to the teams in late June and into July. Quite frankly,

they've worked so we haven't changed a whole lot. Our testing regimen has been similar. We've added some tools to that toolkit, but everything else has been similar. And again, because we're in a bubble, what's going on in the rest of the country, while we're monitoring it and things like that, we're evaluating -- guests, by the way, are held to the same as anybody else coming in. It's seven-day stay-at-home orders in the lead-up, testing before they come and they have to return negative tests when they get here, a seven-day quarantine with testing every day before they can join the bubble.

Q. My question is around the timing of the test. Can you provide a little more information about when the test was that came back inconclusive on Sunday afternoon as well as how many tests in particular and when the Seattle Storm have had inconclusive tests? Are you waiting for a test that was administered this morning for that player that you're still awaiting results or was that last night? If you know information on the timing, I'd appreciate it.

CATHY ENGELBERT: The question on testing timing is an interesting one because that's something that's not consistent day after day, because again, we're using different tools and technologies and some take longer than others. Some get in one run. Some get in the second run. That's why you're not getting everybody back in one big fell swoop, because there's only so many that fit on a plate that get run, et cetera.

So the tests on Sunday were tests that were administered on Saturday. They came back Sunday morning. That's the answer to that.

How many, I don't have an exact count. But we went to two a day instead of one a day. We're just ramping that two a day up with this morning's tests for the group. All four teams got tested today, but we were doing a little extra testing on Seattle, as I think I described on Sunday that we were going to do.

Q. I was curious whether or not there was any consideration to stop the Connecticut-Vegas game? It was the game I assume when all the Seattle test results were coming back, but given that there was a question over whether or not the integrity of the bubble had been compromised, was that a consideration at all on Sunday?

CATHY ENGELBERT: There were several considerations related to that in real time. One, you start the contact tracing immediately. Did they do anything with any of those teams on the court or with Minnesota in close contact as defined by the CDC? Were there other things

where there would have been cross-team activities? Which there weren't, again, because they had a bye and they were essentially practicing, et cetera.

Did we think about it? Yes. But I think by the time we got all this information, that game had already started. It was, again, clear to us that one of the things we'd been told by our specialists throughout this whole season is one of the reasons for doing testing so often is that if you end up with someone being confirmed positive in the bubble, you're getting them out into isolation before they're actually infectious.

Were there to be a confirmed positive, we were pretty sure that if we took that player, put them in isolation, that there wasn't a risk to the rest of the bubble. Why we canceled the second game was because of the multiple players on Seattle and we just weren't sure, again, whether there was an infection that was exposed to that team. We were pretty sure – but you never know with COVID -- that it wasn't a full community spread. That game went on. I think that was the right answer. As we sit here today, of course in hindsight it looks like the right answer because all of those teams have continued to return negative COVID tests.

Q. I just want to switch topics really quickly. At the end of August, I believe, there were some reports of a surge in TV ratings for the league, and I was wondering if you might be able to comment on how ratings have been since then.

CATHY ENGELBERT: I don't have the data right in front of me because the purpose of this call was obviously this evolving situation from Sunday. But I would say it's been -- our playoffs rarely go up against the Stanley Cup. They rarely go up against NBA. A little bit go up against NFL but not significantly. And honestly, there's so much live sports on right now because everything was delayed and restarted at the same time that I'm not focused so much on exact TV ratings.

What I am focused on for the future is how we drive more fans, how we use different platforms to drive those fans. Like this year, we added Facebook Oculus and renewed Twitter. And then how we drive more fans to be interested in our players. I think ESPN has done a great job of promoting us. CBS Sports Network has done a great job. All of that is what I'm focused on, making sure we get more exposure, and we have. Rather than looking at individual kind of game-night ratings when, again, the competition around the horn here is enormous because of usually not having to compete with major men's sports playoffs, getting into their Stanley Cup and the NBA Conference Finals and Finals. That's what I'm focused on.

Q. Was there any thought of having some sort of a forfeit situation with the game? Was this in the protocols before, that if multiple players tested positive a game would be postponed? I'm kind of wondering how that particular decision was made. And also was it just the three players with the inconclusive tests who were quarantined or was it kind of the whole team since you didn't know about whether it had been infectious?

CATHY ENGELBERT: I'll address the latter first. It was just the three players that went into isolation under our protocols. Our protocols also call for, and we've employed this before, that anyone who's viewed as a close contact, which the rest of the players on the team would also -- would not be isolated in their rooms but they would not be together, not socialize together, but all they could do is basketball activities. That's just been our protocol since day one when someone has either a positive or an inconclusive on the team while awaiting further testing. So that's that.

On the forfeit versus postponement, I think, again we had foreseen situations like that, as we saw during the year and as we got into the playoffs with fewer teams, we did put a communication out to the teams, the four semifinal teams, that we need to obviously evaluate each situation, facts and circumstances, whether it was for any reason. One of the things we've been evaluating, a hurricane just made landfall last week north of here, thankfully not in Bradenton, and what would happen there and how would we think about postponing. And then certainly COVID was on that list, too. So we kind of were scenario planning already that we could run into a situation if we had an idea that there was potential spread on the campus that we might need to postpone a game. Then obviously forfeit would come into play if, for instance, a substantial portion of the team that they couldn't field a team on the court, then that would result in a forfeit.

That didn't happen in this situation, but it could have. That is a scenario if it could not field a full team on the court.

Q. Cathy, to shift a little bit, I wanted to ask about how honoring Ruth Bader Ginsburg came together, but also, how do you react to the fact that your brother league in the NBA didn't really do the same?

CATHY ENGELBERT: We were focused when Justice Ginsburg passed away on I guess it was Friday night, obviously being a women's league, being someone who has advocated for women's empowerment myself in my career before I came to the WNBA, I've long admired Justice Ginsburg. We wanted to make sure that we had a



moment of recognition of her, and that's what we put together. Unfortunately, because I was dealing with this evolving situation with COVID-19, I was supposed to be in the arena for it but I didn't get to be there because I was dealing with making this decision on whether to postpone the game or not and consulting with our experts. But yes, a lot of our players admired Justice Ginsburg, and so we thought it was appropriate for us to do something.

Q. I'm curious if you could define community spread and what that actually looks like, and if there are three buckets, say the players that tested negative, the inconclusive tests, I guess there would be two at this point, and then this final test that we're waiting for, when is Seattle's opportunity to be on court again starting with, I guess, Sunday's announcement? When were those three buckets able to actually engage in on-court basketball activities again?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Using the testing we have available to us and obviously there's turnaround time on all these tests, I think for the team that had all negative tests on Saturday's tests that returned on Sunday, they were, I would say, again, good to go for basketball activities. But no socializing, no eating together as part of our standard protocols. And then those three players were in isolation until they returned two negative tests 24 hours apart. That's obviously what we've been doing, and again, just awaiting this one last test.

Q. I'm not sure exactly how the protocol works, but since the tests were inconclusive on Sunday, have all of those tests been negative, or have there been any inconclusive or even positive tests before players tested negative again?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Let me make sure I understand the question. Again, we have a variety of testing mechanisms in our tool kit. We have non-rapid. We have rapid. So we've been running tests on all the players, and again, two of the three players have returned two negatives 24 hours apart. We're just waiting on the result -- the other player returned a negative yesterday, and we're waiting for hopefully a second negative this afternoon to return. So that's what we're waiting for.

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