

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Mike Tirico

Reggie Miller

Jamal Crawford

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the NBC Sports NBA playoff media conference call. We're joined by Sam Flood, Mike Tirico and Reggie Miller, Jamal Crawford.

SAM FLOOD: Thank you for joining us. We're really excited to head into the playoffs after 100 regular-season games produced by NBC Sports both on NBC and Peacock, starting with that crazy double-overtime thriller in Oklahoma City to launch the season, with a banner raising for the Thunder, and to now think we're going to get into the playoffs and end our year with the Western Conference Finals.

And we'll see where we end up. Could it end up where we began? We're also really proud of the fact that we are back in the all-star business. And how much fun was that U.S.A. versus the world in the middle of the Olympics and all the passion that came with that game?

We're looking forward to this playoff run, and Wemby's first playoff game will be called by Mike Tirico and the other two gentleman on this call. So, Mike, you get to bring Wemby onto the court to start his playoff career.

MIKE TIRICO: Thank you, Sam. Looking forward to the playoffs and to your questions. It was almost a decade for me. It was May of 2016 in Atlanta that we had LeBron and the Cavs knocking out the Hawks to end that Atlanta season.

That ended my run of doing NBA playoffs for 13 years, whether it was calling the games on TV, hosting the studio show or getting to call multiple Western Conference, Eastern Conference Finals and NBA Finals on the radio are.

So the chance to get back in a building for the playoffs has



me so excited. Last year, when I knew we were going to be a part of this again, I got the chance to go to a Pistons-Knicks playoff game that Reggie was working with our friend Kevin Harlan. And just to be back in the building for a postseason game reminded me how thrilling the next eight weeks will be for all of us.

The buildings are alive. Nobody's talking about the players and maintenance or this or that. It's the best of the basketball players in the world at the highest level, with great coaching, great intensity and just absolutely bananas atmosphere in the building.

So can't wait to get to San Antonio where they've been waiting (lost audio) --

SAM FLOOD: Reggie, why don't you take the ball.

REGGIE MILLER: I appreciate that, Sam. I've made no secret that this has always been my favorite time of the year springtime, because you've got baseball just beginning in spring training, which flows into March Madness. And we saw a lot of those unbelievable, great moments that our partners do at the collegiate level, which March Madness kind of flows into the opening day of MLB, which flows into, what most of us have to deal with, tax time.

And when it's tax time, it's always the beginning of the NBA playoffs. So this stretch is always my favorite time of the year. It was as a player. And now as a broadcaster, to have the opportunity to see the best athletes in the world competing for the ultimate goal, which is winning an NBA championship, which team can dig deep and win four games.

We're going to see a lot of exciting action. So, look, I'm pumped. I'm pumped to do this on NBC and to work with the great Mike Tirico and my partner in crime, the Rainier Beach coach of the year, I'll hand it off to him, Jamal Crawford.

JAMAL CRAWFORD: Jamal. I'm so excited to be working with Reg and working with Mike on NBC. I'm not just saying that because we're working with NBC. This really, literally, takes me back to my childhood, watching all those playoff series, watching all those match-ups and just the storytelling, how it sets the tone for imaginations of the



younger generation coming up watching and what basketball could be and the peak level of it.

I'm so excited to get to San Antonio. This will be my first time going back to San Antonio. Actually got in the gym and worked with Wemby for a week. And I remember at that time, I'm like, okay, we're going to work on these specific areas because this is what's going to matter in the playoffs. And here we are.

So the West is loaded. The East, obviously they have some favorites. But just watching, every team believes they have a chance. I think that's what makes it so good for all of us to enjoy, to bring to life for everybody else.

And I cannot wait. I haven't been this excited since day one we were in OKC. And I just know this playoffs are going to be everything we want it to be and some things we can't even imagine. So I'm excited to get started.

MIKE TIRICO: This is Mike, I'm back on. I wanted to make sure I was setting the tone for the playoffs and getting out of Reggie's way. So I did that on the call here, just to set the tone for Sunday. (Laughter).

In all seriousness, been a decade for me. Can't wait to get back into the building for what the postseason is all about. And for us at NBC, almost a quarter century. So excited that we'll have the NBA playoffs on NBC to enjoy.

Look forward to your questions, but look forward to also being back in the buildings for these great, great days and nights.

Q. This question is for Reggie and Jamal. It's about the Rockets Lakers series. I know a lot of people are writing off Los Angeles because of the injuries to Luka Doncic and Austin Reeves. But do you see any potential stumbling blocks for the Rockets in this series as it begins?

JAMAL CRAWFORD: For me, Bron is -- we just watched him in Dallas. They lost that game, but just seeing the bop in his steps, seeing how he was managing the game, I'm not saying that he is happy that his two other best players are out. But he has something in him, like he's almost trying to prove something. He's trying to prove that he can still hold down the fort and he can still bring guys along.

Obviously, the role shift of going to a third option is something he's never done. But he did it because it was the best for the team. But now he's back in that driver's seat. And if he can just bring some guys along with him -- he's been in this situation so many times. There's not going to be a coverage that he hasn't seen. There's not

going to be a scout that he can't adjust to.

So if he can bring guys along with him, I fully believe he thinks in his mind that he has enough to get it done.

But on the Rockets side, Kevin Durant, we talk about him as a scorer. We need to start talking about him as an all-time, all-around great, because he can do every single thing on the court. And he does it in such a way that doesn't disrupt the flow of anybody else.

And it's so special to watch. At this stage in his career, still to be this great and this elite, still be one of the very best players in the league, his team believes they have a chance. The way they defend, the way they guard, the Rockets could be a tough out as well.

REGGIE MILLER: I think both teams have potential stumbling blocks. I'll start with your Rockets first. And it was kind of highlighted, if you remember, that two-game match-up they had with the Lakers, and defensively what the Lakers did to them.

They basically just got the ball out of KD's hand and said, look, you're not going to beat us. Someone else on the floor is going to have to. And they basically were playing 4-on-5, and the Rockets really didn't make any adjustments.

And you fast-forward to how the Rockets ended the season, I think Ime did a great job of correcting those mistakes, putting guys in different positions, having Sengün at that high post area, so when the double teams did come, to me he's their best facilitator, and being able to find the slasher, Amen Thompson, at the rim and finding Reed Sheppard and Tari for the 3s.

Another thing that is a question mark for me for Houston, if you just look at their crunch-time numbers, if the game is close, I just feel there's way too much isolation and waiting for Kevin Durant to bail us out. There's got to be a little bit more flow to their offense, especially in playoff basketball, where there's not a lot of fast breaks, where it's more of a half court game.

You've got to be able to have options other than your 1A and 1B, which is going to be KD. Other guys are going to have to have to be able to make plays.

I think for the Lakers, their stumbling block, the health. We don't know if Luka, AR, if they will be back, how effective they will be.

But an injury a lot of people they're not talking about, and a player that they're not talking about and it was so important

for the Lakers when they went on that run, before the injuries, was Marcus Smart. I thought he has been playing some of the best basketball, certainly being in a Laker uniform. And defensively he was the held of the snake. And he was just directing everyone around.

So if Marcus Smart, if he's back and he can be effective, all these guys, the health of the Lakers, as much as I love LeBron, that's a lot to put on a 40-plus-year-old guy, to say, okay, now revert back to the old LeBron and do what you used to do. It's not a light switch where you can turn on and off.

So I think both teams could have potential pitfalls. That's the beauty of a 4-5 match-up, because it really is a 50/50. These games, in these series, always go six or seven, because it's that close.

Q. Speaking of 4-5 match-ups, just want to get your thoughts on Cleveland and how they've done since the James Harden acquisition, and how you thought Harden is fitting into them. But just also with the injuries that Cleveland's had, really that core four hasn't played a lot with Mitchell, Harden, Allen and Mobley -- I think just a total of 79 minutes -- just whether you guys see that as kind of a detriment going into this Toronto series?

REGGIE MILLER: A lot of question marks for Cleveland. A lot of question marks coming into these playoffs. If you want to break it down even more, there's going to be individual questions for James Harden, who hasn't had the greatest of playoff runs in his career.

Same where you could make a case for Donovan Mitchell as well. As great a player as he is, he's kind of stumbled his years in Utah, just last year when they had the overall best record in the East and stumbled in that second round versus the Pacers.

But what I do know, when you highlighted their core four and only 79 minutes together, when they have played together, they've been very effective, especially James Harden and Jarrett Allen. Jarrett Allen has been great, especially in the high-screen role with Harden.

We know the talent is there, but the problem is, when you don't have a lot of chemistry going into high-stress situations like the playoffs, and against a team like Toronto who, I mean, let's face it, they've got some guys that get after you -- Scottie Barnes, Brandon Ingram, you know, (indiscernible) -- these guys, they understand the gravity of it all and they play hard, they play together.

Again, these 4-5 match-ups are 50/50. They can go either

way, and they're going to be long series. And Cleveland is going to have to figure it out and figure it out on the fly because it's going to be interesting because there's going to be all eyes on James Harden and Donovan Mitchell, because that was the big question mark, can they coexist?

It's been a small sample size, and I like what I've seen. But Jamal can tell you, the playoffs, they bring out the ugly side of you sometimes. So I'll be curious to see how they perform under the bright lights.

JAMAL CRAWFORD: For me, I think (indiscernible) in the game, there's always a burst of energy. Always more energized. He brings energy to that city, to that team, to that ball club. And when the playoffs hit, that's when things get a little more choppy.

For Harden, he's the thinker. I think he doesn't get enough credit as being a facilitator as much as he is a scorer. And he's had some playoff struggles, as Reg alluded to. And Donovan Mitchell, I feel like those two, with their backs against the wall, they'll have to step up. They'll have to rely on each other as well. If one's having a moment that's not so good, the other one has to say, okay, I'll take the reins for this next quarter or whatever, until you get back on track.

Not playing, you know, but 79 minutes with those four, it's definitely something that's not ideal going into it. But it is the situation. And believe me, Toronto's not going to feel sorry for them.

But also, you know, with Jarrett Allen, the way he plays, he could fit in. He's not just, like, a primary scorer, where it's like, I need the ball in this spot or I need it at this time. He can play off of guys really well. His energy won't change if he's not getting the ball as consistently as maybe you should.

It's going to be an interesting match-up because these two teams I could easily see this going seven games and just seeing who can muster up enough to win that last game, but it's going to be so, so close. But I think that's why it's going to be so entertaining for all of us.

Q. Question for Sam. Just want some insight as to some of the scheduling decisions that are going to be happening. I know NBC's going to be having weeknight games. Will those be doubleheaders? Will they be single-game windows with other games that night on Peacock? I've asked this before, but now that we're getting closer and closer, can we expect to see NBA playoff games following the Kentucky Derby in a couple of weeks and then the Preakness Stakes a little bit later in May?

SAM FLOOD: Well, scheduling-wise, we've got our windows set up for the first part of the playoffs for the first round. Just waiting on some results tonight where we can announce it all. As you know, the first Sunday is set with the Detroit game, followed by the Spurs game. So that's good to go.

Then we have an NBC doubleheader on Monday and Tuesday coming out of that with one Peacock game each day as well. So three games that we'll be producing. So that's really our first three dates and then it rolls out from there.

Yes, you can look forward to an NBC game coming out of the Kentucky Derby. Mike will get to host the Derby and send it off to Noah and the team getting ready to call the game for whatever that is, that Saturday coming out of the Kentucky Derby.

Q. Is that also going to hold for the Preakness? Because that would coincide with a potential conference final opening weekend?

SAM FLOOD: Not 100 percent sure, but I believe that's the case. Since I'm in production, not programming, I let the programming guys make the final calls on that. But I believe that's the plan. But as you know, in sports, things change occasionally.

Q. This is not a question but just an observation for Mike and Reggie. Correct me if I'm wrong, Mike, I believe your first playoff game for ESPN was Reggie and the Pacers at home against the Celtics. I don't know if you have any memories of watching Reggie in your first playoff-game broadcast for ESPN about 23 years ago. But that's what I believe is the case.

MIKE TIRICO: I think you're right, too. I can recollect Rick Carlisle being the head coach of the Pacers and doing that series and being a part of that. I hope I trashed Reggie during the broadcast.

REGGIE MILLER: He did. He did. I went back and watched. He did. (Laughter.)

MIKE TIRICO: I was probably too worried to do that. That's a good one. I think I'll have to go back to the archives and check that out. I think you're exactly right now that I recollect the '03 season, because I was doing studio and some games. And that was one of them that I did during postseason. Good pull there by you, John. Thanks.

SAM FLOOD: I looked at the calendar. We do have a

game out of the Preakness.

Q. So you said there is a game after the Preakness?

SAM FLOOD: If necessary. Obviously if there's a game available, we have a window for it.

Q. Sam, question for you regarding all the cool toys you guys are able to roll out this year. How did you think "On the Bench" went, "Fan Box," the vertical video that you guys went with Peacock on, how did all those experiments and innovations go? And what will we see in the playoffs carried through from those?

SAM FLOOD: Well, all the tech that we're using on Peacock will carry through. The vertical video, the courtside live, the ball and player tracking, all those will be available during the playoffs.

As for "On the Bench," we're not going to be able to do that during the playoffs, but we will keep the "On the Bench" group together to do some games. They will, instead of being on the bench, they'll be together at the table. So we'll call it an "at the table" game.

So we are really pleased with how "On the Bench" went. It gave just a different opportunity to have former players sitting next to the bench who understand the code and the game, gave new insights.

It became such a fun thing to do that Tirico worked to change his schedule so he could do a game in Miami so he got to be play-by-play in an "On the Bench" game. And, Mike, I believe you enjoyed it.

MIKE TIRICO: It was fun. It was so cool. You do hundreds of games, and to do one with a different format -- and as Noah had experienced, and the same with Michael Grady, and they both shared with me; Noah did specifically -- the fact that you're doing the game and you can see your analyst, you almost make more eye contact in an "On the Bench" game than you do in a regular game because of where they're sitting on each side. It was San Antonio and Miami, and it was a treat to have the analyst focus on each team.

So really cool and fun experiment. And Sam's the one who answered the question (lost audio).

SAM FLOOD: Apparently Mike needs a new A1 since his phone keeps cutting out.

Q. What has it been like watching Wemby and calling his games and seeing his progression along with the Spurs' progression as they have a lot of great young



talent?

JAMAL CRAWFORD: It's almost not real, to be honest with you. To give you some insight, working with him was one of my top five basketball experiences ever.

And being with him was so incredible, seeing how he thinks and the dinners and the time spent away from the court just talking was even more impressive than the work on the court.

What separates Vic to me is the fact that we see all this freakish talent, we see these freakish things we've never seen before, but at the core of who he is, he's a role player.

He does all the little things. He'll sprint if he doesn't get the ball. He'll try to block every single shot. He'll hustle into a screen.

He'll do all the things that we applaud role players for doing, but he's just this guy that's, like, futuristic, with how he plays. He's so coachable and so understanding his place in the game, and he understands how great he wants to be.

And he has a really good grasp on that, on humility, on balance and on chasing his own greatness. He's not competing with anybody else but himself. And he's trying to maximize that every single day.

And I'll tell you guys something I haven't told anybody is when I was there, I was talking to Pop, Pop was like, he's a gift. He's a gift. We may have held him back a little bit, even when he started his rookie season.

So to see him get to this place, I truly believe the Spurs have what it takes to win. I said this before they even matched up with OKC this year, I thought they had a chance to be this year's OKC Thunder. And luckily enough for us, we're blessed enough to see that his first playoff game will be right there front and center, bringing it to life. So I'm so excited.

REGGIE MILLER: In all my travels, people come up to me and they ask, appreciably recently, what is it like what is it like to call a Victor Wembanyama's game. And I saw it's surreal, because there's only a handful of people in my opinion that truly revolutionized and changed the way we view games and how we interact and watch games.

You tuned into, especially in the '90s, to the Chicago Bulls for Michael Jordan, because you were going to see a guy basically walk on air. You were going to see something that you had never seen before.

I say the same thing for Stephen Curry, because anytime

he gets out of his car and walks into the building, he's live. He can make it from anywhere. You are mesmerized by watching his movement without the ball, and obviously his shooting.

Victor is in this category. You don't know what you are going to see, but you're going to witness something spectacular and special.

And Jamal talks about freakish talent and doing all the little things. All he wants to do is win. And for him to be so young and not afraid of the moment, he wants all the smoke. He wants to guard the other team's best center, best player.

You could switch him out on point guards. You could play him against more physical guys like Joel Embiid and Jokic. It doesn't matter. He wants all the smoke, talent.

And players like that are very rare to come by. And I know everyone's going to be harping on the Spurs' non-experience and do they have to take their lumps before they become successful? I think it's better to have a team that doesn't know what pressure really feels like and just goes out and plays, as opposed to a team that's kind of been through the mud a little bit, because they don't know what those experiences are.

So it is going to be fun to see how they navigate dark skies, because there's going to be some dark skies come playoff time now.

I want to see how Wemby and the rest of -- Castle, Carter Bryant, some of these younger talent guys that have not really experienced what NBA playoff basketball is all about, it's going to be fun to see how they navigate it, because right now they are just playing the game of basketball and just playing on raw talent.

Another thing people aren't talking about, too, the head coach, Mitch Johnson -- because now coaching matters. Now strategy matters. How do you adjust from game to game?

Coaches become highlighted now come playoff time. During the regular season, it's all about the players and talent.

Playoff basketball, you look at their head coach a little bit more now because now you have to make adjustments in real time, in-game adjustments in real time, post-game adjustments. What did they do? Who did they take away? How do we adjust to that?

So Mitch Johnson, people are going to start looking a lot --



a young Pop now. Think about who he's following in a Gregg Popovich.

So this is going to be his first foray into playoff basketball as well. It's going to be fun to watch.

MIKE TIRICO: I was thinking about this yesterday. We have a lot of great athletes in many, many sports right now. In terms of being unique and rare and uber talented, maybe only Shohei Ohtani of the Dodgers -- (lost audio).

REGGIE MILLER: He got us. I was holding on to that story, too.

JAMAL CRAWFORD: You know he did his research.

Q. Sam, wanted to ask about the Sandbox virtual technology in the studio, if you guys were happy with that the times you used it, if you guys are planning on using it again come postseason.

SAM FLOOD: We'll 100 percent use it in the postseason. It was a great piece of technology. We've used it with the Tour de France. That's where we really fell in love with the concept and how it executed.

For the NBA, it's been a great add and Carmelo and Vince and T-Mac enjoyed getting over there and playing on the big table. Playing in the sandbox is always fun.

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