

Big East Conference Media Conference

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Val Ackerman

Joel Fisher

Press Conference

MODERATOR: Thanks everyone for coming over to our special announcement. We'll have Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman, Joel Fisher of Madison Square Garden, Executive Vice President of Marquee Events and Operations, MSG Entertainment. And this is on ASAP. So we will have a transcription after we're done here. And Val and Joel will be available for questions.

VAL ACKERMAN: Welcome, everybody. Thanks for being here. The Big East Conference and Madison Square Garden have been a match made in heaven for more than four decades, 42 years to be exact. And I'm very happy to report that we have renewed our vows and extended by four years our contract to play the Big East tournament in this storied venue through 2032.

That year, the Big East tournament at the world's most famous arena will celebrate it's 50th anniversary. So mark that date on your calendars. Hopefully many additional anniversaries of this one-of-a-kind tournament in the iconic venue will follow.

We can say with pride that the Big East tournament at the mecca of college basketball has established itself as a New York City staple. It has brought incredible competition, enduring rivalries, roaring crowds, college basketball's best players and coaches, and heart-stopping moments. It's been the perfect set for our TV partner the last 11 years, Fox Sports, with plenty of room for the drones to whiz around and capture the scene.

For the Big East, this building is an enormous part of who we are. It's home. As you all know, our conference has been through considerable change over the course of the past 45 years. But as the past couple of days have shown yet again and as tonight and tomorrow we know will reinforce, the Big East tournament at Madison Square Garden has remained the constant that has withstood the test of time.



Our relationship is about history. It's about adult fans telling us they've been coming to this event for years, sometimes decades, first with a grandparent and then a parent, and now with kids or grandkids of their own.

They come in by Amtrak, LIRR, Metro North, by subway. That's me. I came in by subway from downtown. They walk here, or maybe they drive and park close by. They stroll around the city with their school logos emblazoned on their hats or their sweatshirts or their replica jerseys. They frequent the city's pubs and restaurants, maybe take in a Broadway play if the game schedule allows, meet up with old friends, have a beer or two, or three, or four, before the games get underway.

We're so mindful of the proud history of this storied event. We recognize our role as caretakers, and we're thrilled to be in business with a company that respects that history, that treasures it and shares our intent to hold onto it so that future players, coaches, referees, journalists, security guards, Garden staff and fans, new and old, will get to see it and hear it and feel what the magic moments are all about.

So on behalf our presidents, athletic directors, men's basketball coaches and supporters here in New York and throughout our conference, we want to thank Jim Dolan and Joel Fisher for a spectacular run and for your willingness to preserve this unique and enduring alliance and keep a great thing going.

Joel, I'm so appreciative of our working relationship and our friendship and your incredible longstanding support of Big East basketball. We've had late nights, many, many highs, a couple of lows, most notably navigating through COVID in 2020 and '21. That was fun sitting here explaining why we had canceled the Big East tournament that year.

But through it all -- that was not fun. But through it all, our bonds have strengthened, and we've made it through together.

I want to extend our special thanks also to Sal Federico, Larry Torres, JoAnn Esposito, Anthony Gennusa, and Rich Walker and the box office team for your tireless efforts on our behalf.



So, Joel, before I turn things over to you, I want to present you with this ball which is autographed by all of our head coaches as a small token of their and our gratitude for all you and your staff do for us and our schools. So thanks for everything and hopefully the best is yet to come.

JOEL FISHER: I'm sure it is, and thank you, Val.

And before I start, I always wanted to sit up here, watching the press conferences. So it's great. (Laughs).

Madison Square Garden and the Big East tournament have been synonymous with each other for decades, and we are thrilled to extend that partnership with the country's premier absolute best basketball conference. The rich tradition of the Big East tournament has produced many of the Garden's most celebrated college basketball moments, and has cemented itself as the most anticipated of all of our annual events. There is no better place to experience the excitement of the Big East than the mecca, Madison Square Garden.

It's been here for 40 years, and we are so thrilled to extend our partnership with the best college basketball conference by far in the country. Val and her staff -- and I echo Val's sentiments -- the working relationship we have is just incredible. It's been great from day one, and there's just been -- they've been tremendous to work with.

To be the longest-running conference tournament at the same location speaks volumes. And to host it ultimately for 50 years -- and trust me, it will be more than 50 years, 2032 -- is really, really special. As Val said, fans have the opportunity to continue the longstanding tradition of coming into New York, the city, Madison Square Garden, to watch college basketball at its very best every March. There is no better place, none in the world than Madison Square Garden for the most exciting conference tournament you'll see.

And just to end, you see it in this year's tournament again, every event, every session is sold out. You see games like last night, and you turn to whoever you're with, and it only happens here at the Big East tournament in Madison Square Garden. It's just special.

We're looking forward to tonight for another special night, but it's been an incredible partnership. What Val has done from the day she took over has been nothing short of amazing. And it's just gotten better and better every single year. And we didn't think it could, but every year it's better. So we are so thrilled that this will continue, and we can actually say, 50 years, and it'll go beyond that, as I said.

I'd like to present Val with -- oh, she's got something first?

Oh, okay.

VAL ACKERMAN: All right. So, Joel, we have a little -- this is our little small thing. But we have our -- you've got your own Big East tournament jersey, with 50 years on the back. So let me hold this up here.

JOEL FISHER: So this is special. First of all, it's in gold -- not real gold, but gold -- and it represents 50 years, obviously, gold.

This is the key to Madison Square Garden.

VAL ACKERMAN: How cool is this?

JOEL FISHER: So Big East conference and Val Ackerman, the key to the Garden, celebrating 50 years of basketball here.

VAL ACKERMAN: Oh. Thank you so much.

MODERATOR: We'll take some questions.

Q. I had never thought about this until Val mentioned it, but can you talk about Big East not only being the centerpiece of college basketball here and the value that it adds to MSG, but talk about the value it adds to New York City as well.

JOEL FISHER: Yeah, I mean the Garden, we consider -- everybody here, starting with our chairman, consider the Garden the center of New York City for not only college basketball, in a large way, college basketball, for pro sports with the Knicks, the Rangers, all the special events that we do, all the concerts we do.

People come to this city, and one of the things on their bucket list is to come to Madison Square Garden, for any event, and especially during March Madness to the Big East tournament. So, yes, the Garden is a large part of New York City, and we're very proud of that.

Q. You mentioned the tourism aspect. Has New York City come up with a dollar figure for what this week means? And we have the Ivy League tournament up in Columbia this year.

VAL ACKERMAN: Exactly.

Q. I'm just curious if you've ever come up with that, and do they get involved maybe with negotiations?

VAL ACKERMAN: No. We certainly haven't involved them, but it's a great question. Probably worth finding out because the beauty of this for us -- and this harkens back

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to the early years here. We obviously get great pickup from our eastern seaboard schools. I mean, from Providence to Georgetown, the ease of getting here from right over at Penn Station or Moynihan Station. So it's automatic. They're going to come in. Maybe they'll go back home and come back.

But what's been very heartening is to see the response from our Midwest schools. And I think that was really revealing last year when we had an all-Midwest final for the very first time, and we had robust turnout from the participating teams as well as that of New York City college basketball fans who support this event even if they didn't go to one of our schools.

So it's a great question and probably something we should look into.

JOEL FISHER: And what I'll say, too, is I don't know the figures, but I know that New York City Tourism, the Convention, is very supportive of everything we do here. We're a member of the Convention. It is a bureau. I'm on the executive committee. And they support everything that we do as far as in helping the city bring people in.

And I'll also say, like Val said, when we first started out, we didn't know how this, quote, new conference would be. Well, to me and to all of us, it's better. I mean, look at what we see now and look at the amount of great schools.

And that first year -- Val talked about last year, but that first year when Creighton made it here, Creighton traveled crazy. They had so many people here. That was the year Doug McDermott was named Player of the Year. So we got lucky maybe a little bit, but that set the tone. And from then going forward, it's been sold out and just a great, great tournament.

And we did not skip a beat when it changed, and that's a lot of credit to Val and her entire staff.

Q. Val, when your conference's flagship sport is basketball, can you approach long-term partnership discussions with a bit more certainty maybe that others because maybe you're not cut up in the football uncertainty?

VAL ACKERMAN: Well, I'll affirm the second part of your question. At least for now, we're not unhappy to be out of the football fray right now, and there's a lot of fraying going on, as you know.

And I don't foresee -- we sometimes get asked might you guys bring back football, and the answer, I don't see it with this group of schools. We're sort of happily

basketball-centric. We're sponsoring 22 sports now. We have schools that play football. We just don't get involved with it.

I will say we try hard to plan, and this is a big piece of that. We hope to have news before long about our new national television arrangement. Nothing to report today, but that's an important pillar in terms of our future.

I'll just say generally in this operating environment, given the legal threats to the collegiate model, what's happening in the courts, what's happening at the National Labor Relations Board level, the pressures to sort of make there be a different relationship between athletes, at least in certain sports and their schools, it's going to be pretty hard for anybody to write a five-year plan at this point.

But we're very happy knowing that for the next eight years, something that's been so core to our DNA, being in this building, these four days out of the year, with the energy of the crowd, the way the Garden just sort of -- the lighting and the acoustics and the crowd noise, it all combines. It's really -- you guys have been part of it. I don't have to sell you on it.

But it really is something that our presidents are going to want to keep going for as long as they possibly can. And if the college sports world happens to change, so be it. But I think the constant will be that we're going to stay here no matter what.

JOEL FISHER: And I'll add with the relationship that Val and I have and our teams -- Val mentioned a lot of members of my team and her team. We work so well together. And Val and I spoke at the beginning of the season, Well... Right when the season began about extending the agreement.

So it was never a hardship. It was never difficult. We got through it immediately. A lot of that -- look, I'm lucky. I'm here on the front lines, but I have the incredible support of our chairman, Jim Dolan. And the entire company, who's very much into this, knows how great an event this is. So I really want to thank him for his support.

I know Val did, and Val's got a great relationship with Jim, and he supports me to make sure that we continue to do this. So this was easy in a lot of ways. We spoke about it right in the beginning of the season, and we stuck to our words in saying, let's get this done. And we did. And it was a no-brainer for both of us.

Q. You mentioned the Fox deal is coming up. Does Joel get involved in that, having the national TV deal (indiscernible). Is that something you guys want or do



you guys work on that together?

VAL ACKERMAN: You know, it's interesting because so many schools play here, want to play here. That puts Joel in touch with really every television network. So you work with everybody.

JOEL FISHER: Yeah. I work with everybody.

VAL ACKERMAN: And he does and can work with anybody. I won't speak for you entirely, but we've been heartened because your relationship with our network partner is terrific. They've done a lot of games out of this building, and it just kind of turns out to be -- at least for us, I would describe those as our two principal business relationships, our network partner and being here at Madison Square Garden. But I wouldn't say you get directly involved in our business with that.

JOEL FISHER: No. It helps because we do a lot of college basketball here. We try and do the biggest and best games. We work with all the networks. But Val has -- Big East has a conference every year. I attend that. And obviously Fox is there, and so we have relationships. And even tonight -- I mean, I can mention tonight, you know, just working together, and you guys know, tonight we're starting a little bit earlier than we have in the past.

That doesn't happen if Val doesn't work with Fox and me. And she came to me, to her credit, and said, how does it affect you, how does it affect the fans? And we worked together, the three of us on something like that.

So I don't really get involved at all with the negotiations that Val has on TV networks, but there are definitely conversations for something exactly like that. Because she's very concerned about not only the TV, but with the live audiences and how that affects us. So we work together on all of this.

Q. I'm thrilled that you're here, but I do have to ask a question. (Indiscernible). Next year they're moving to Orlando, which is very costly. I'm curious if any of your partners have ever come to you and said things are pretty pricey here. Did the economics of New York City ever come up for this tournament?

VAL ACKERMAN: Really not at all. Yeah, believe it or not. Maybe that doesn't sound credible, but it's true. I mean, even our Midwest teams, who have told me at times, you know, if we were in Chicago, we'd have X, Y and Z instead of A, B and C. But even they say, but don't move it. Don't move it. We love coming here for our schools.

And as is the case in most conference tournaments, an event like this one just becomes a hub of activity for your donors, for your key supporters. There's a lot of fund raising activity that's going on here with our various schools. They have the restaurants they go to and the events that they conduct on an annual basis. So for them, they can knock off a lot of business, if that makes sense, by being here.

And every school, to a one, knows what this conference tournament means to the Big East and what this building means to the conference tournament. So very easy decision on our end.

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