

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Jordan Poole

Media Conference



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Q. Can you talk about Marcus Smart's impact on the defense especially?

JORDAN POOLE: Well, first and foremost, huge addition to our team. I've been on the other side of playing against Marcus for the first six years of my career, and I think everything that you saw tonight from him is exactly what we need but also what makes him such a great player.

His presence, his energy, his physicality. He's a Defensive Player of the Year, so he allows us to be extremely aggressive, and I think that really helps our team, us being pretty young. I give him as much respect as a lot of other teams in the league, so he just brings a different energy, a different physicality, and when you have a reputation like he does, you're allowed to go make aggressive plays on the defensive end, and he was huge for us tonight, and I think that he'll be an amazing addition to our team, and we can just learn so much. Him, Khris, they're extremely vocal, and they kind of walk us down throughout the course of the game and continue to stay in our ear and our guys' ears and he was huge tonight. He was a big part of the reason if not sole reason why we won that game.

Q. Speaking of defense, Kyshawn finished with three blocks and three steals and had really active hands in the paint. Can you talk about his progression over the season?

JORDAN POOLE: Yeah, kind of similar to what I was just saying about being physical, I think he was getting a little bit frustrated with the way that he was getting calls throughout the first half of the season, and I went and I told him pre-All-Star that he's just establishing the type of defender that he's going to be throughout the course of his career, which is lengthy, active, aggressive on-ball defender. A lot of calls were going against him earlier on in the season. Some of that has to do with our reputation as a team. Some of that has to do with him just being a rookie.

But I told him just to continue playing that way because now we've added a guy like Marcus and he can add that physicality, and the refs can't call that every time down the court, and I think the last couple games we've seen how impactful -- even in the Bucks game we seen how impactful he can be when they allow him to play, and I think he's doing a really good job of adding his reputation of the type of defender he's going to be, and he's been exceptional.

Q. How annoying is it to play against a defender like Marcus Smart? What kind of mental impact when he plays that physical defense, what does that do?

JORDAN POOLE: I mean, it's tough. Obviously he's top three defenders in the league. He won Defensive Player of the Year as a guard, which is pretty tough. You're in for a tough night, long night, whenever you have to go up against Marcus.

I mean, it's just a tough matchup. You've got to be aggressive. Like I said, I've been on the other end of that, and you've got to find ways to get him off the ball. I'm just glad that he's on our end and he's a physical defender. That's what makes him great. That's what makes him special.

I had to end that without giving away his secrets.

Q. A year ago is when BK pulled you out of the starting lineup. If you think about what last year was like and what this year was like, what feels like the biggest difference?

JORDAN POOLE: I'm playing my true position. I think that is what the message was last year at this time, I was very vocal about me feeling like there were other ways that we could go about that. But ultimately it just put us in a situation personally to where we are now, which is sometimes you've got to take a route that you don't want to take to get to your destination. Here we are.

Q. What do you remember about the way BK

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communicated the decision to you? That's the kind of thing that he was a pretty new coach at the time. For him to do that and you guys still have the kind of relationship that you have now, what does it say?

JORDAN POOLE: That set the tone. We just had a meeting about it. I think he was very vocal and very open initially about it being a safe space to express how I feel, and it wasn't like a, I'm going to tell you this is what it is and I'm going to tell you this and this is what it is. It was more so, feel free to voice your opinion. Feel free to say what you think. Not only for that moment but just our relationship in general, that I can come to him and say something that I see or something that I think needs to be changed, and he can kind of be aggressive to me, tell me I need to be better on defense, tell me I need to set guys up more.

A very respectful, open dialogue relationship that we have, and I think I've expressed this more than enough times, just the respect for Coach BK is extremely high. We're just continuing to build that and trying to find ways to just get better as a team.

Q. How do Marcus and Khrist fit into the defensive puzzle? It seems like you guys already have quite a few pieces with Alex, Bilal, Kyshawn. How much further do they get you guys towards having the defense click?

JORDAN POOLE: What's really special about adding those two guys to our team is their veteran presence because they've played at the highest level. They know when to slow the game down. They know when to get this look. They know what team is trying to run what for who at this time.

Tonight we saw that. We saw that in the Milwaukee game. But tonight we as a team felt the poise from them in the time-outs. In the game I think there was a couple opportunities late in the game where we got the rebound. I think Marcus got one and he looked for me, and we were both on the same page about just slowing it down, and me and Khrist were on the same page about what plays to call in that moment, how to exhaust plays, knowing what to get to down the stretch.

It's essentially what BK has been preaching all year, which is just possession-by-possession basketball, and we as a team need that. It's good to see. It's good to learn from. These guys, like I said, they've played at the highest level, and it's kind of natural for them, and they've been in the league so long, it's almost comforting to know that you've guys out there who have played at the highest level with me. We feel settled. Offensively and defensively, it just

brings a different energy.

Q. Coulibaly had the most shots tonight. What's it like to see him being aggressive on offense and his growth on that end of the floor since you first started playing with him?

JORDAN POOLE: Yeah, I'm a big fan of BC. I think everybody knows that. Just his growth over the course of his two years. He's an extremely elite defender and he's always on the best player, which makes it more impressive to see how aggressive he still is on the offensive end. He's still learning, and he's still figuring out what's comfortable in his game. He's a smart player, so he's starting to read the game a little bit differently, and it's good just to see him being aggressive and continuing to build his confidence, and I think when he's out there with the right guys and the right group, we're also instilling confidence in him, and we need him to be aggressive and make shots and get stops, make plays for us if we want to be a good team.

Q. It seems like you really embraced a mentorship role, especially with the young guys. Is that something you could have envisioned yourself doing last year or earlier in your career?

JORDAN POOLE: That's a good question. I've always envisioned myself being a leader. I didn't think about it being like a veteran older guy/younger guy situation. I always thought it was more so just the experience and the level of basketball that I have played, just trying to share the knowledge that I have learned with guys who haven't played there or new guys to the team.

But it's dope because you have a really good group. We have guys who listen and guys who want to get better. We have guys who love the game, who are passionate. We have guys who are authentic. You can go be honest, be genuine, and it's accepted properly. We all just want the best for each other in this locker room, and it makes it pretty easy to go out there and battle night in and night out.

Q. Do you think that the struggles you went through last season helped you at times to give the younger guys advice just because you've been through some challenges?

JORDAN POOLE: I just think the struggles that I've experienced throughout my career have put me in this situation, not only just me personally, but I think players throughout their league, throughout their career, because essentially that's how you learn is going through tough times or going through challenging times. It's dope. It's cool. You've got to be proactive about the way you learn and to try to apply that when necessary. We're all still

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learning. You never stop learning no matter how many years you've played in the league. It's really cool to kind of be in this situation and this role of leadership that I'm in now.

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