

Washington Wizards Media Conference

Monday, April 14, 2025

Washington, DC, USA

Khris Middleton

Media Conference



KHRIS MIDDLETON: (Audio joined in progress) -- last night, game winner by Bub, game winner by J.P. in Denver. I think those are two moments, plays, wins that stick out the most just with what they were dealing with before I got here, the season they were having. Then me coming here, seeing a different side of it, being in the middle of it, seeing those guys excel, and winning games is always a good thing.

Q. What are the top ways you think you helped the team get better?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I think being myself, being a basketball player. That's just the way I try to make my impact. Tell them what I see. Just because it all comes from a winning place, I want to win no matter who makes the shot, makes the pass, who does whatever.

I think me being myself, that's the best advice I've gotten in my career as far as being a leader.

Q. You mentioned this team next year could have the potential to be a lot better. What do they have to do to get to that point?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: It's going to take a lot of work. Can you see the flashes, you can see the potential. You have to be that consistently in order to take those steps. In order to be that consistent, you have to put the work in. It's not easy, but making it to this point, making it to the league, making it to any team, any contract isn't easy either.

Q. When you look back to the trade and then getting here, what was the one thing being on the opposite side that surprised you the most about what this organization was trying to build that you knew where you could then implement yourself?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Yeah, before I got traded here, you hear the rumors about what's going on here, what type of organization it is. Once I got here, I can definitely say that hasn't been the case at all. I've been surprised about how

great this organization is, what they're trying to build here.

Once I got here, I think that was easy for me to see and easy to buy in. They're all about doing things the right way every day, the daily habits, competing, being a great person on and off the court. Those type of things made it easy for me to come here, buy all into it.

Q. Knowing that you were returning to the floor, trying to get your way back, then you dealt with another hiccup, knowing that they weren't putting the pressure on you to be on the floor, allowing you to recover, allow you to be you, how much did that give you some comfort in everything going on with how quickly it happened?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Yeah, yeah, definitely I want to thank them for that. It's been a rough couple years with a lot of injuries and whatnot. Coming into the second half of this season, I think their primary focus was trying to get me back to as close to 100% as can be while still playing. Didn't get to finish the season like I wanted to.

The work that they were putting in with me behind the scenes gives me a lot of confidence going into the off-season, heading into next season, that I won't have to keep dealing with these things hopefully.

Q. When you look at the young group that you are surrounded by, how much did the young guys bleed into you and bring back -- I don't know if they brought you back some joy. It seemed like you were very jovial, especially the last maybe month of the season, seemed like you had a different aura about you from when you first got here. How much of that gave off to you, too?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Credit to those guys. They welcomed me. They made sure I was involved in everything, the group chats, the activities, whatnot. That made it a smooth transition.

But these young guys are great. On and off the court

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they're great people. They work hard. They listen. They want to learn. Yeah, you add all those things up, it's hard to not enjoy being around these guys. Hard to not enjoy playing with these guys, win or lose, when they're trying to do things in the right way.

Q. Sometimes the winning culture precedes the actual winning. What do you notice here that could lead to better records down the road?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Just the habits, the way we work here. Every day, try to find a way to be efficient, try to find a way to get better, learn the game. Take things seriously, be a professional.

All those things, you won't see them overnight. But day by day, year by year, you'll start seeing results. It won't happen overnight. It always takes time.

You got to have patience with this. There's not a lot of overnight success, teams that go from worst record to Playoff team or championship team the next year. You just have to continue to stay with this, stay with the process of working and buying in.

You know you're going to fail. Those failures are going to be great for you because those are learning experiences.

Q. A lot of young guys, rookies. Is there anyone or anything that took you by surprise?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I would say their development. I think as the season -- you guys probably saw them get better all season long. I definitely saw the jump just from the moment I got here up until last night. That's promising. That's exciting to see. That's what you want as a teammate, being on a team where you can see their improvement as a team and from each player as an individual.

Q. You talked a little bit about the rumors. What were your expectations about Washington? How did it differ from what you actually saw?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Just it's a franchise, organization that really doesn't know where they're headed, trying to figure out their roster, trying to figure out who they want around. Those type of things.

Once you get here, you talk to those people who are making the decisions, who are in those situations, and you realize it's not what you think it is. They're actually trying to do things the right way.

Q. What did you see from the team culture when you

got here, and how did it change over the couple months?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I don't think it changed since I got here. They were going to do the right things. We're going to work. We're going to try to win games. We're going to play the right way, win or loss. We can live with that as long as we did what we were supposed to do.

Q. You know the plan now. Have you made a decision about your player option for next season?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: No, not yet.

Q. You always have been a high-level defender. When you look at defense, is it a talent thing, taught, or mentality?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I think it's both. I think a lot of it has to do with mentality just as far as being a competitor, seeing the guy against you, trying to learn their tendencies, trying to learn how to win every single battle, be one step ahead of them, those things.

Q. You made it known that you believe this could be a Playoff team next year. What needs to go right for that to happen?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: A lot of things. One is health. Two is you have to improve. Three, you have to go through some type of experience.

I think losing is a big experience because you can lose a game so many ways, just like winning. I think you tend to focus on the losing a little bit more, pay close attention to those details.

I definitely think this team could be a Playoff team. Just have to develop, work, have a little bit of luck on our side.

Q. Personally what are your on-court priorities for the off-season in terms of the areas you're going to work, the areas of your body you're going to pay attention to?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Yeah, I think overall weight room is always going to continue to get stronger. As you get older in age, you have to figure out how to keep your body as fit as possible. Those are two main points for me in the off-season as far as off the court.

On the court is always trying to find ways to improve, trying to figure out what I can add. Just become a more efficient player. That's something that I've always strived to be, just an efficient offensive player, for sure.



Q. Given all that you personally bring to the table that's unique, you're probably going to be in demand with other teams. How do you deal with uncertainty of not necessarily knowing where you might be given that you are so highly valued throughout the league?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: One is focus on what I can control. I think once you get to that bridge, that's when you cross it. I mean, I don't like to really think too far into the future, start worrying about scenarios in my head that aren't even on the table yet.

Once that time comes, I'll start thinking about it. For right now, it's not...

Q. You were on teams that were competing for championships for a very long time. Was there anything beneficial coming to a team that's not there yet, is just starting on that journey that was eye-opening to you?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I mean, the situation that they're in now is what I was in Milwaukee my first couple years. I wouldn't say anything surprising. It was just I remember these days, what it's like walking into a game, you know the percentages aren't on your side to win.

You get out there, get a chance to do what I love to do, and that's play. That's also a chance to show other teams and improve what you can do.

But it started there. We wouldn't have won that championship if we didn't go through the things we went through. That's one of the things I try to tell the guys here. It's okay we're going through this. It's not career ending. Most players have gone through this. The better ones survive it and find a way to get out of it. So yeah.

Q. How do they survive it?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: It's all about the work, knowing that you're going to fail. Understanding that you're going to fail and understanding that it's a good thing when you fail because you get to learn from it, just like your wins. You get to learn from it. I think that truly makes you better. It makes you better in your workouts, what you need to improve, those type of things. That's how, yeah.

Q. Do any of the young guys on the team remind you of yourself at all? If so, who?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I would say maybe Kyshawn George a little bit with his size, his position. He plays my position. He's a guy that can do everything on the court.

He's a great passer that people don't really realize. He's a great defender, which I think a lot of people know. He's a great shooter, which he's known for. He can put the ball down on the floor. He's doing all this his first year with a lot of confidence.

He's a guy that has a lot of potential, just like a lot of them. He's a guy that reminds me of myself more than anybody here.

Q. Have you opened up with the young guys about what you learned in Milwaukee?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Of course. I think all of us, we share our experiences. I think it's something that we can all learn from each other's stories. It's not just myself, but it's also the young guys, the in-between guys, the two-way guys, everybody. We're all trying to figure out each other's story.

Q. You mentioned earlier when you first got here that the young guys were kind of helping you learn stuff as well. Can you elaborate on that.

KHRIS MIDDLETON: That's more the system, how things operate in the building, for one. Then on the court, plays, positions, movement. Just trying to be on the same pages, knowing that sometimes when they're stuck, they need an outlet somewhere. I don't know those things because I haven't been here, so I need those guys to help me out with that.

Q. You saw the way AJ showed up at training camp and then closed the season. You saw the whole rookie year for him. What stood out and what did you think about his progression?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: First, proud of him. Happy for him. Coming into training camp, a lot of people were on him just about being a point guard. A young point guard, a rookie year on a veteran team is tough. You're the guy with the ball, and everybody is screaming at you for the ball. It's a little difficult. I think he handled it great.

For him being in the G League for most of the season when he was with the Bucks, that's tough. That's a grind. It's not the same travel, the same type of style of play. It's not the NBA.

For him to go through that process, stay positive, be a professional, compete, then get traded here, get an opportunity to show what he can do was great for him. If he takes that into the off-season, finds ways to improve his game...

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