

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Will Dawkins

Media Conference



WILL DAWKINS: Good morning, everybody. Thank you guys for coming. Got to see a few of you yesterday at the Mystics press conference. Obviously it's an exciting time we have for the youth movement with Monumental Basketball. Definitely want to say congrats to Jamila, congrats to Coach Syd and all the young ladies that we welcomed to D.C. yesterday.

Haven't got to spend too much time around them, but it's definitely an impressive group, and listening to them talk kind of inspired me in adding young players and continuing to do it the right way. Excited for them.

Everybody in this room and those that couldn't make it today, I do also want to say that I appreciate the coverage that you guys gave us, especially through this type of season. Not the easiest to do, but you guys were very professional, and I hope that we're able to kind of reciprocate that for you guys, as well.

I think the stories that you guys allow to tell for the fans to get to know our players, it's really vital, and the way you guys go about it is important, and I know our players appreciate it. Michael appreciates it, and I do, as well. Thank you guys for that, and grateful for how you guys interacted with us this season and look forward to coming back even more.

Varun, I saw you posted you're not a rookie anymore. That's not the case. That's not the case. You're still a rookie until next season starts. So Alex and Bub and those guys, they're still rookies until they tip off next season. So close, but congrats on getting through all 82.

Michael and I want to start by thanking ownership, thanking our fans, thanking the staff, thanking the players, the people who were around every single day for their commitment, for their belief and the hard work that they really put in.

The 24-25 season, as you guys can imagine, was not the easiest to navigate, but I feel like we did so with great energy and great connectedness. While I'd say the season

was far from linear, we finished off on a good note.

It wasn't just Bub hitting that shot, which was obviously awesome to see, and good to hear the call from that one - it was pretty inspiring - but just the last two and a half plus months, kind of how we finished the season.

We felt like we wrapped up the year feeling a little bit more optimistic about the direction that we're still slowly trying to build towards and we're slowly starting to climb.

I think I mentioned at the beginning of the year the season was meant to be one of exploration, and with that comes a lot of the unknowns. With that comes a lot of discomfort. With that comes a lot of the growing pains that you expect, and we felt a lot of those throughout the year.

But I think unfortunately, it actually started at the very beginning of the year in training camp where we had a lot of injuries and unfortunately we closed the season with a lot of injuries. That kind of set us back a little bit and kind of threw us off.

But through it all, we got to see more from different players, and that next-man-up mentality is something that I think our guys really rallied around, and those opportunities that they got early on, which probably weren't earned, more given, those opportunities allowed us to be in a better spot at the end of the season, and for us moving forward, we will always want to be playing our best basketball towards the end of the season. That's the goal for any team in the NBA. And I think we did that this year. So that's an accomplishment for us.

To take it away from basketball, I'll get back to kind of on the floor a little bit later, the players came in here on Monday, answered some questions from you guys about what it's like to play here. From the answers I was able to read and the answers that they gave Michael and I in the exit interviews, I feel like we made some progress, and we made a lot of deposits into the culture, which is important to us.

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I think the number -- I was talking to our PPE group, the players did close to 90 different community activations this year. If you include the staff, which didn't do all of them with the players, it was over 100, and that's really what we're talking about. So while we're not chipping away at the final score of each game to the level we want to do yet, we definitely made some positive strides into our environment and into the community and making culture deposits. That's something that's always going to be top of mind for us and something we're always going to continue.

We did all that by showing up like we talked about, by being a little bit more competitive towards the end of the season and then evolving how we play. We talked about where we're at as an organization. It was very much still a continued cycle of discovery season for us.

I think we were top five in age again this season, one of the top five youngest teams all season. Beginning of the year, opening night, I think we started our youngest opening night roster in Wizards' history. We set the record for most starts in the history by players under 21 in a season. So it was obviously a very young group.

The rookies that we drafted, that we had from the beginning of the season, a couple of them dealt with injuries, but all three of them still got over 1,800 minutes, and that's the first time a trio of rookies have gotten 1,800 minutes in over 20 years. For us, we're pouring into the future. We're pouring into those young guys, and we expected it to be a little rocky. Being completely honest, we stumbled a really good amount out of the gate, but I do think we found a little bit of a rhythm towards the end of the season.

Stylistically under Brian it was the first year completely where he had the training camp to do what he wanted to do. I thought he did a really good job of giving guys opportunity, let them play through mistakes, but also holding them accountable and making sure the environment every single day was one that was repeatable.

You when you watched us on the court, offensively we continued to play with pace. I believe we were top four. I think we finished fourth this year by the end of it in pace. That's top-five pace two years in a row. There's only one team that was able to do that other than us in the last two years. So we've continued to play fast, even though adding different players.

But what I was probably more impressed with is while we were playing fast, we changed our shot diet, and for us that was important. I believe it was 34 percent of our shots this year were from three, and that would put us top 10 in the

NBA. Obviously it's a huge help when you have Jordan Poole having the season that he had to help us make the most career threes individually, but as a team we made them, as well.

I believe we put out a stat that we had three rookies make over 100 threes, as well, which is the first time ever in NBA history, so the game is evolving. These players are growing. Our style has got to change. So while we played fast, we also took more efficient shots.

But I think it all started by moving the ball, being less sticky. We all watched it the year before and the ball wasn't moving enough, so we wanted to make sure we were doing that. Last season we were 19th in total passes, and this year we were seventh. The ball was moving. We were sharing it. We were still playing fast, and we were taking more threes.

That's kind of where the game is going, and as we continue to develop and put some time in on the basketball court, hopefully those shots go in a little bit more. But we were finding and taking the right shots and playing the right way.

But defensively, we will be known as a defensive team. We weren't good enough this year. Especially at the beginning of the year we struggled mightily early. I think as guys -- it's going to sound weird, but as guys got older throughout the year, they definitely got more comfortable playing, using their hands, not fouling as much, being in the right position, knowing what players can and can't do, learning players' tendencies.

I think we made a few moves at the trade deadline to add some defensive-minded vets, as well, and I think that's when you kind of saw the system that BK wants moving forward. And probably I'd say that February to mid-March before we took that 13-day seven-game road trip where we had a couple guys go down for the season, we were a top-15 or so defense in the NBA.

Not where we want to be, but a lot closer to what we wanted to look like. So for us, we saw some things on that end, as well, and made marginal improvements in specific areas we were looking to do, as well.

We're getting closer. But again, I've got to give a lot of credit to the guys, the environment when you walked in every day. We asked them for it to be a 0-0 mindset, no win, no loss, no losing streak, no win streak; whatever it is, we come in with the same mindset every day, and I think that's what allowed Jordan Poole to have the year that he had. I think it's what allowed Corey Kispert to grow and become the leader that he grew into. It allowed Justin Champagnie, who I'm so proud of, someone who



completely bought into the system, who worked his behind off through the jump season, went through Summer League, played with the Go-Go, really invested in that program -- and quick shout out to Cody and the Go-Go and the season that they had. I thought they were tremendous this year until they took some injuries.

Hopefully the awards are coming out here soon, I think later today. Hopefully we'll have some guys on first team, as well. I just thought that the Go-Go did a good job this year.

But J.C., just embracing and immersing the player development system the way he did, establishing himself as an NBA player this season, I was very proud of him.

But I can go on and on about our players. I think Bilal took some major steps defensively. Obviously you guys know about the four rookies and I'm pretty sure your last question is about them, so I'll save that for later.

But having that group and then adding high-level vets like Malcolm and Khris and Marcus, we're not supposed to have those kind of guys when you're going through a rebuild like ours. They were so helpful and impactful.

Post-trade deadline I think we started to see what Wizards basketball is going to be and what it's going to look like, and that was a positive sign.

Around here, we talk about it all the time. We're going to acknowledge the growth. We are going to celebrate every small win. We're going to keep our head down and keep stacking days, keep working hard until we look up, see where we're at, put our head back down and get back to work.

You've heard it time and time again, but we realize we're still in that early phase of fighting for sustained success. That's what we're trying to get here, our longevity, where when we enter into the Playoffs it's us there for a while, not in and out, and to do that we've got to build slowly and build the right way, and while we understand we're not close, we are closer, and that's the goal every single season.

I do feel like we laid some bricks to the foundation this year, and now that the season is officially over, we sat down with the guys, and my message was from the time you guys all ran out on the court to go celebrate with Bub to the time we officially pick the ball up October 1st for training camp, there's 170 days. 170 days. There's 365 days in a row, so that's roughly 46 percent of the year that we're off.

We can't be off. We have to turn that into time where players are getting better, team is getting better, everybody is taking a jump.

I kind of challenged them to be different players when they come back. Some will be coming back shortly, others will be coming back closer to the end of the season. But I think to a man, everybody appreciated that and wants to take that challenge and improve physically, improve mentally, improve skillfully, and we all know the goal isn't to be sitting on our couches in April and May and June watching NBA basketball, so how are we going to chip away at that, and that starts with maximizing those 170 days we have.

With that, if you guys got any questions, I'll open it up.

Q. You mentioned how this will be a defensive team and you can see that some of the defensive pieces are there, the Bilals, the Kyshawns, the Alex Sarrs. How will you guys end up tying those pieces together?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I just kind of smiled when you asked the question because you included Kyshawn in that. I think some people when we drafted Kyshawn didn't see him having the impact that he could potentially have defensively. But he really embraced that and got better throughout the year.

Obviously Bilal and Alex think defense first, and the size, the length, the versatility, the ability to switch, it's kind of what we were looking for within our team.

Again, we weren't where we needed to be defensively, but we have measures that we looked at. So you add the length, you add the switching, Kyshawn's blocked shots, Alex's blocked shots, last year we were 14th, this year we were 11th, so incremental gains there.

But in terms of actual shot contests, we ranked eighth in the league, so we were forcing guys to take tough shots, and that's kind of what you're trying to do. I think last season, opponent two-point field goal percentage, we were like 28th. This year we were 19th. That's a huge jump for us, especially with a young team.

So we add a couple more young players, we get them a little bit more comfortable physically, like we're making that jump in the top half. So incrementally getting better on defense. And there's other things like rebounding we were dead last last year and moved up five spots. We're going to continue to get better.

But it's all about the focus and the mindset, and when we talked to the guys at the end of the season, they understood it, and they think defense first, which is



important.

Q. Going back to Kyshawn and his emergence as a defense, it wasn't just the defense, also the on-ball play making, especially in the second half, and those are some things that didn't really reveal themselves very obviously when he was at Miami. Can you talk us through spotting that and bringing it out once he got here?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think Kyshawn's evolution is a good story for young players, the way he started the season offensively struggling. I think the first month of the season I think he was shooting like 12 percent from three. But from February 1st on, it was 39 percent from three. Never got discouraged, never doubted himself. I think I talked to you guys a couple times where it was like, hey, I thought he was going to be this offensive player; like, don't rush the process.

But he's got size. He's got versatility on offense. Defensively his ranks were pretty impressive. Even when we sat down the other day, I was like, I didn't think you were going to be this level defender this early, and he just kind of laughed.

But our evaluators were spot-on early on him. They were, hey, you need to come see this guy. Like, okay, okay. Like, no, really, you need to come see this guy. Didn't play well. They're like, that's not who he is; come back again. We have really good passionate evaluators who stayed on Ky and we feel like we got pretty fortunate there.

But defensively this year, effective field goal percentage, like the type of shots that the players take, 91st percentile across the NBA. Not rookies. Like that's high level. Blocks, 91st percentile. Deflections, 81st percentile. The kid was very, very active. And steals was 75th percentile per position.

He was there, and you talked about the offensive stuff, I think the most telling stat or number we have for Kyshawn is he led all rookies in the NBA in on-off differential. So when he played, he has a positive impact on our team even when he has the ball or doesn't have the ball, whatever the role was, and that was throughout the entire season. So we got to see that growth towards the end offensively, but he's one of the hardest workers and I'm not surprised that he had the finish that he had.

Q. How do you think your organization is viewed by players around the league right now?

WILL DAWKINS: I couldn't tell you about players around the league because I don't have too many conversations

with them. I definitely talk to my colleagues around the league, and I talk to our players about it, and even sometimes when you talk to Khris and Marcus, when you pick them up from the airport when you make that trade, it's like, hey, what do you think of the Wizards; what do you know.

Michael and I have only been here for 22 months, but the goal is to kind of rebrand, and when people see what the Wizards' logo, it means something different.

I know that a few players, other teams have commented on just you're not walking in Washington anymore. Like it is what it is; we're going to compete; we're going to fight.

It's still TBD, but I think we're moving in the right direction, and people see what we're trying to do, and it starts with the player care, and it starts with the type of players we have and the environment. And those guys get it. They're workers. They're about the right things.

DMV, D.C., basketball city, one of the best places in the country to live, and now we're starting to add the similar type of hungry players. I hope we're trending in the right direction, but I couldn't answer that for you in terms of other people.

Q. What do you think it will take to get this organization viewed as one of the best in class in the league going forward?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think it's about pouring into the people, pouring into the resources, and ownership is completely on board with that, and they've given Michael and I the opportunity to build it the right way.

I think it starts with the staffing and then the player care. I think everything else will take care of itself.

It's weird; the basketball part isn't easy. But it's easier to figure out because we're all basketball people. But figuring out how you run an organization and treat people the right way and treat the media the right way and everybody has a good experience when they come to the basketball game, that's important. And when they're in the community and you have guys you can root for, that's important.

So there's a lot of things outside of the wins and losses that kind of stack up to being a place where people want to be, and the facilities piece, thanks to Mayor Bowser and everything, that's changing. That's changing here, and that's really going to help us, but more so it's the culture, the environment that's evolving I would say.

Q. Marcus told us on Monday that he's working with

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Alex on developing his mentality. I'm curious how much you think Alex developing sort of a dog mentality could help his development, and as a whole what you thought of his development over the course of the last season.

WILL DAWKINS: Sure. First can I talk about Marcus a little bit if you don't mind because I don't think I can answer that question accurately if I don't talk about Marcus.

When Marcus first got here, we talked about, hey, I'm very familiar with you. Like I lived in Oklahoma when you were at Oklahoma State. I saw you a ton. I know what you're about, and I've still got family in Massachusetts that are huge Marcus Smart fans just for how you play the game. His time in Memphis wasn't what he thought it was going to be. Not his fault, not Memphis' fault; sometimes it just doesn't work out.

We told him, I want you to be you. I want you to kind of help yourself get back to being yourself and finding your joy, and I think he found that here. He told us that. Obviously he played really well, shot the ball really well, defended. But I said, we also need you to play the role of someone who can uplift people. And he made me better. He definitely elevated the staff and just how we scout and game plan, and he really helped all of our players.

It's not just Alex and Bub and the young guys. He made Jordan better. Jordan is looking to his right, I've got Marcus Smart with me? I can do a little bit more.

So the impact he had on the organization in the short amount of time he was here and even when he injured the finger again at the end of the season, he was bringing a lot of value inside the locker room and even in the time-outs.

For a defensive player like Marcus Smart, who is elite and has been elite for a long time, to see some defensive signs in Alex Sarr tells us a lot. So I don't know what the term you called it, the dog, the fight. For a 19-year-old, I think we're all pretty impressed with the fight that Alex Sarr showed this season.

Obviously Marcus and a lot of people in the organization see where he can go, which is a pretty high level, so of course he's going to continue to talk to him and continue to work on those things. Trust me, we've had a lot of conversations with Alex Sarr about who he is, who he wants to be, and he wants to be great, and we're going to try to give him every resource to do that, and if you run his numbers, it was pretty impressive for the rookie campaign that he had because Alex to me is not just a defensive player. I think he's a defensive first player. It took him a little while to kind of establish himself on the offensive end,

but he's an all-around player.

Only rookie in the NBA to be top 5 in points, top 5 in blocks, top 5 in rebounds, and I'm pretty sure he was the No. 1 big in assists. The guy knows how to play and has an impact on both ends. We ran the numbers. One of three players with 100 assists, 100 blocks, 100 plus blocks.

The list of rookies that have averaged like double-digit points and 1.5 blocks is pretty insane. It's a ridiculous list. Then when you make that list, 12 points, one and a half blocks and two assists, it's pretty good company. I'm not going to tell you who's on it, but if you want to do the research, we showed him the names, and there's a lot of Hall-of-Famers, a lot of Rookie of the Years, high-level players. Alex had a tremendous season. We love that people still want more for him because we know he can do it, but he's well on his way.

Q. Looking ahead to the draft, there's still a lot to be determined, obviously, including the number of pick that you have. What are your thoughts on overall the level of talent in the top echelon of draft prospects this season?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah. I think it's a good draft. It's definitely not as international focused as it was last year. I think you'll see a little bit more American talent.

But not every player has declared yet. We don't even know who's going to be in the draft. But in the event that most players are going to be there, we're going to be happy to add another good young piece. But I'm trying to put a bow on this season first before I dive too heavy into the draft. But you guys know I like the draft and we like to draft here, so we'll get to know those guys sooner or later.

Q. Jordan Poole, his emergence as a leader here in D.C., is that what you envisioned when you acquired him from Golden State?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, we traded for Jordan for a reason. We knew how talented he was. I would say the first half or first part of the season last year, he struggled, and I think we're all on record talking about that, but the second half of the year he started playing like Jordan Poole, and as he got more comfortable through the summer, you got to see the year that he had this year.

He really emerged on the basketball court. BK trusted him with the ball, gave him opportunities. I think everyone knows that he had a career year in terms of points per game. He had a career year in terms of three-point percentage. But I don't think enough people talk about he had a career year with steals. He had a career year in



blocks. He had a career year in assists. He impacted both sides of the ball and got better, and that was kind of the development plan for him.

You've got to let Jordan be Jordan, and I think Brian did a good job of that. But inside the locker room he kind of took a lot of ownership of the environment here and took some of the young guys under his wing, and again, Khris and Marcus when they got here really helped him see the game. Those are championship-level players, and he was one, as well.

So he felt good about the season he had, as he should feel good about the season he had. But Jordan Poole is a big-time player. We knew what we were getting with Jordan.

Q. How does it make you feel when the fan base, the official motto is let "Will Dawkins cook"?

WILL DAWKINS: I'm not on social media so I don't feel it as much, but I would say the organization cooks, led my Michael Winger, who I learn every single day under him. I'm so grateful to be under his guidance. He puts us all in a position to do our job, and I have an embarrassment of riches around me. Like it's a joke that I can go to Michael for anything, leadership and guidance, but also Travis Schlenk, who's done the job at the highest level; Troy Weaver, who just turned around a franchise; Amber Nichols, who is on the grind every single day.

Most people don't have the assortment of talent that we have just as evaluators, pure evaluators but strategists and innovative thinkers. The group is deep, and I think to kind of answer your question why you feel good about what you're doing, what you're changing, the people in the building and how they think.

We've been a lot of different places that have done well, and you can't replicate everything where you've been, but we take the different ideas, get in a room, and I'm happy that I'm very often not the smartest person in the room so that we can learn and grow and get some stuff done, and I think that's what we do. We're a big community so we're trying to let the Wizards cook, but we're not cooking enough yet.

Q. You talked about building slowly. I'm curious with the pick for next year being top 8 protected, how does that impact your approach for the off-season? Do you still consider yourself in that deconstruction phase that you said you were at the beginning of the season?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, the pick has been encumbered since we got here. I don't think it's affected how we want to

go about things too much.

The plan is to continue to grow through young players. If our young players make a massive jump and we go forward, we go forward.

But in terms of the deconstruction, the foundation piece that I was talking about, building it back up and fortifying it, I'd say we're probably still in that little right angle -- is that what we do, that little corner, that deconstruction build foundation. We're still down here. We're still in the early phases of what we're trying to do.

I think we found some players and laid some bricks that will allow us to continue to build, kind of build that base, but I think we're still over here in this little corner.

Q. What conversations have you had with ownership about the organizational timeline? Would they be okay with another season that looks like this last one with low wins and a focus on player development?

WILL DAWKINS: I think I wouldn't focus on wins and losses. It's hard to predict what that is. But the ability to continue to steady grow. We haven't put a timeline on when we want to get there. We want to make sure we're providing the runway for guys to take off and play young players, and I think we did that that year and we'll continue to do that next season.

You saw the young lineups; you'll see a few more next season for sure.

Q. Do you feel like you were kind of ahead of the curve with a guy like AJ Johnson who didn't play too many NBA minutes before he got here and then he had some huge gains obviously recently? What's it like to evaluate guys' progress like that, sort of low to high?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, again, I've got to give a shout-out to the evaluating group. Johnny Rogers, Travis, the guys last year, you travel all the way to Australia and the guy doesn't play. But you go to shootaround, you go to practice, you get to see him in those environments, you get to see him play in high school events before that. So you know what you're looking at and you knew how talented he was, and when we're trying to find opportunities for him, you don't know where that's going to come from.

But I kind of view him -- it's weird, coming to Oklahoma, like I became a college football fan living there. So you know how a high school quarterback graduates early and goes to campus, gets in the weight room, trains, then you play him in the spring game, like oh, there's something there, and then you get to September, you're like, it's really

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a freshman still? That's kind of how I view what AJ did.

He's not going to be a rookie next year, but for us coming in it was like, hey, let's take your time. We know you got this and that; let's work on your body, these type of things. Play some minutes with the Go-Go; at the end of the season we'll give you an opportunity. Injuries called, forced him into it a little earlier, and he wasn't afraid. He attacked it, showed his elite speed, elite athleticism, and also the ability to defend. He's going to be a two-way player.

For us it was like, hey, you just got some extra varsity minutes here. Next year will be a complete through the Wizards jump season, like our hands on, complete buy-in development, and it will be like more of a traditional rookie year for him. But for him to get that experience at the end of the season, we feel like he's headed in the right direction.

Q. What do you look for the most when you're adding young players, whether it's the draft or trade or what have you?

WILL DAWKINS: People first. It will always be people first. But we have our 94 by 50, the attributes we look for that we think will help us win, and a lot of those are pretty consistent.

Q. You mentioned those mid-season trades at the deadline, bringing in Marcus Smart, bringing in Khris Middleton really helped energize the team. That impact, is that going to affect the way you guys approach this off-season when you're looking at Khris Middleton's option, bringing back Malcolm Brogdon? Does that kind of mid-season success affect the way you approach this off-season?

WILL DAWKINS: It's Khris's option, so he's going to inform us if he's going to be back. We definitely want him back.

I would say it affects us in a positive way. I think we know a little bit more about what works, and we know a lot more about this group.

Michael, when he spoke to the group at the end of the season, was like, I couldn't be more proud of how we finished the season, all the guys in here. But there's 18 roster spots in the NBA, not 25. We're going to draft some players, and we've got to make some roster decisions. And I just tell the group, make the decision hard for us. Young guys, work, grind, be in the gym and let us see your growth and make the decisions really, really hard for us. That's the goal.

Again, we'll have a lot of time and a lot of opportunities to adjust the roster moving into the draft, free agency and all that other stuff, but we're very pleased and I feel like we have more answers because of those veteran players.

Q. In a similar sense, you mentioned there's no firm timeline. You guys aren't looking at wins and losses as a goal. What does a successful off-season look like for you?

WILL DAWKINS: For us, one, getting away, getting a break, reconnecting with family. I'm not really saying that in jest. Like you really do need to decompress. It's a long season. Hopefully you guys get a break, as well. Get away, get a break, and then really review what we did.

We have a strategic plan. Let's go back; did we follow it, did we stick to it, what's the next phase. I don't think we're going to deviate from it, but if we do deviate, when, do we have a little bit more answers.

I think it's breathe for a little bit, revisit what we're trying to do, and then fully invest into it. So for us, we'll have some roster decisions, but it starts with player development.

Unfortunately, this time of year last year we had to hire a lot of new people, just staff, support staff, head coach, and we didn't really have the time to really stop, think and just review what we did.

We have a great opportunity to do that this year because we've established a little bit more habits and we've established who we want to be. Not having to go hire a brand new staff, I'm looking forward to that.

So let's decompress and figure out what we do moving forward, but free agency will have a lot of the similar similarities to what we had last year in terms of how we approach that. The draft we will always be aggressive, but once we learn our picks, I think that'll allow us to kind of strategize even better.

Q. Earlier you mentioned the growing pains at the beginning of the season and you identified injuries as kind of one of those things. I was wondering what other growing pains you might have seen then and how were those rectified across the season?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think the injury piece is hard to really predict. A lot of the injuries weren't because they weren't putting the time in in the weight room. A lot of it was freak injury: I hit my thumb on someone's jersey; I went up for a dunk and someone fouled me; I shot a floater and landed on someone's ankle. Those were all basketball injuries. They weren't necessarily soft tissue injuries. So



our players were doing the right things. They were in the weight room.

Early to start, the connectivity wasn't there. The ball movement wasn't there. The defense wasn't there. That was probably more frustrating to see.

But we saw signs in between. I think I talked about the beginning of the year, like you're going to see glimpses of what it's going to look like, but you can't expect players to be so young with such opportunities to be really efficient.

I think we had 11 players under 22 play this season. That's the most in the NBA. You can't expect your team to be perfect. You can't expect them to know what they're doing and give you a full 48. But we want to be as close to 48 minutes as we could. In the beginning of the season we weren't doing that, and I think we set the record for most games started by players 21 or under: 194 starts.

When you're going through that, you can expect those growing pains, and I think we saw it on how we wanted to play and the consistency of doing that this year, especially early on.

Q. The growth obviously you talked about the players and just getting healthy and that stuff, but also it was Brian's first year as a head coach. He's been in the league a long time, but what do you think he learned and what did you learn about him in year one as a head coach?

WILL DAWKINS: I learned that he knows how to use his phone. We probably communicate, other than my wife, the most of anybody. But when we hired Brian we knew that he was a collaborator. For me, I couldn't ask for a better partner just in terms of communication and style, but also belief in what we're trying to do and going the right way.

He had everybody in the organization, staff and players alike, rowing in the right direction, and I can't tell you how important that really is.

In terms of some of his biggest strengths, I think the relationships with players. I don't think he's a players' coach. I just think he knows how to have relationships with guys but also hold them accountable and jump them when he needs to jump them and give them a hug when you need to give them a hug, and for a first-time coach, that's hard to do, and I think he definitely balanced that.

There were times where he had to deal with a lot of injuries and difficult lineups. It was never an excuse. It's we need to play the way we need to play, the standard is the standard, and we raised that bar. To be able to do that as

first-year coach I thought was pretty impressive.

Some areas where he definitely wants to continue to grow is just making sure we grow the group at the speed we need to grow it at and not skip steps, and he understand that and he's patient with that. But he pours into every player the same, and that's hard to do, especially as a first-year coach, and I'm very proud of that. He represented the organization very well this year.

Q. You talked about the three-point shooting and the shot diet getting a lot better. As a scout and as a scouting group, how much are you looking at trying to draft shooters versus guys that you can develop, like Alex obviously took a lot of threes this year, which you were able to live with some days where a lot of them didn't go in, but you know that's the right play in the long-term. So for shooting, is that something you can develop or something you are looking for actively?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think my philosophy is that's kind of a swing skill. I don't think you can get a guy from bad to great. I think you've got to go from good to great or be great your whole life. But you can definitely go from bad to good, and I think shooting is a skill that can be developed.

It's definitely on those 94 by 50 when I talk about attributes that we look for, but it's more so the mindset to work and grind, and I think you can improve your shot mechanics.

To be honest, Saddiq Bey is an elite shooter. Corey Kispert we think is an elite shooter. Jordan Poole we think is an elite shooter. All three are completely different in terms of form, so it's not go get this shot doctor, everyone shoots the same way. It's reps and being comfortable shooting the ball. I wouldn't teach my son to shoot like Saddiq because he's not going to be that strong to be able to do that. Same difference for Alex. You have to find your shot.

So it's more about work and reps, and that's where I feel comfortable that our guys are going to put the time in to become good shooters.

Q. Earlier in your opening statement you mentioned that Corey grew into a leader. Can you elaborate on what you saw from him from that perspective and what your expectations are of him going into next season?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, very proud of Corey because he found his voice in the locker room. Corey has always been someone who leads by example, off-season, in season, always in the gym, but the way he goes into the community, the things he says to the media, how he conducts himself, you can count on Corey doing the right

thing because that's just how he was raised.

This season when he wasn't going the way we wanted it to go, he didn't sit on his hands. He got in the locker room, he spoke up, he challenged guys, and then he played the right way. Beginning of the season it was hard for everybody to play with the young group we had and not know the offense, we're putting in a new offense and everybody trying to find their rhythm. To his account, he didn't make shots to the level that he wanted the beginning of the season, but I think he really figured it out and started to really come up toward the middle of the season. Unfortunately, he got hurt those last 15 games or I think he would have been right back at his career averages.

But to kind of go through that and have the mentality and bring the group together, that's where I saw that leadership from him. Very, very proud of the man he is and how he represents the organization. We make sure we tell him that.

Q. A bit on a personal note, you were recently honored by the greater Washington Urban League for your leadership with the Wizards and your community impact. What does it mean to you to receive that honor in such a short time period, especially with the fact that you want this organization to be a beacon in the community?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, you know, I don't love to talk about myself too much, but that moment was special just because my family got to be here with me and some of the staff members here who support me. I'm very blessed and fortunate to be a part of the DMV community. They've shown me and my family a lot of love, and how can I and my wife not give back to the community if we're expecting our team to do it at such a high level.

It's one of those things you want to be about it, you've got to do it yourself. I have a pretty good relationship with the Urban League and all the great work that they're doing. They're really impacting lives in the city and doing real work. I get to come and organize and play with a team about basketball, like a child's game every single day, when they're dealing with real life.

Shout out to them. They're amazing. Definitely was not deserving of the award, but I was very happy to accept it on behalf of the people who support me, and that's my family and this organization. So thank you.

Q. I've got a two-part question about Bub Carrington. Bub played all 82 games. Was that baked into the pre-draft evaluation about his durability, and when did it surprise you that he could ultimately play every

game?

WILL DAWKINS: I'm trying to answer this way out of respect for everything he went through this year. Baltimore Bub, that's when we knew. When we went and had lunch with him and watched him work out and challenged him pretty aggressively in the workout and he responded in a way that I was like, hmm, there's some moxie to this kid.

The all 82 games was important to him. It was important to his family. He's as resilient and as tough a kid as I've been around in a long time.

I told him in the exit interview the type of kids that I've been around that have played all 82 and went about it the same way. There was one game where he landed on his head and I thought he was concussed and going to be out for a while. Fortunately it was just a bruise because he has all that hair. He came back the very next game.

So he's a tough kid, tough minded. The resiliency that he was able to show dealing with the off-court stuff that he was dealing with towards the end of the season, I don't know how I would handle it, let alone as a 19-year-old kid, and he did so still bringing joy to the locker room, still bringing energy and still bringing a fight.

He's chippy. He's aggressive. He's about all the right things, and he represented the Wizards logo very well this year. It is the all 82 that we're proud of, but he was productive while he was doing it, too. The only rookie to play all 82, but he's also the only rookie in the league to have four rebounds and four assists this year. He's doing it on both sides of the ball without having the ball in his hands a ton, but I think he's still growing in that level.

The basketball took care of itself, but the person who he is and his family, amazing. Happy to have them in our organization.

Q. The second part of the durability is in this era of load management and the players and organizations sitting guys, was it a collaboration between the player, the training staff and the front office, and when were you as the GM comfortable with him playing 82?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think load management is important. I do think it's a real thing.

But we have specific measures that our guys have to take every single game to make sure that they're there. He hit them every single game. If that's the case, we're going to let him play.

Weirdly enough, I didn't realize it earlier than he did, so we



have those decimal meetings and we give guys report guys every 10 games on where we're going. I think we got to the meeting in game 60 and he was like, I'm playing all 82. I was like, I didn't realize that was a thing. Everybody else in the room was like, yeah, it's a thing. Because he had told people I'm coming, I'm getting better in the training room, I'm adding lean muscle mass during the year. Like I'm going to finish this. And it was important to his family, too, and they showed up and they were in the stands and supported him, and all 82 became a thing for him.

So when we were kind of having to deal with those injuries and playing seven players towards the end, he was like, as long as I'm one of the seven, we're good. He asked, and everyone in the group looked around and said, you got it, buddy; try to finish it. And he did.

Very last thing, I do want to say, I've been a hockey fan, lightly, but this season, incredible to watch the fans at CapitalOne Arena. Incredible what the team and the organization have been able to do. Obviously the chase with the great eight, that was remarkable. Love everything that the Caps have going on. Love how the fan support has supported them, and now that they're going into the playoff series against Montreal, we're looking forward to supporting them, and I want to make sure that we say All Caps; everybody let's support them. Appreciate you guys.

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