

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Will Dawkins

Media Conference



WILL DAWKINS: Morning. Thank you all for joining me today. It's great to see everybody back in this tight room all together. I hope you guys had a good off-season.

I always do want to start and say thank you guys for the coverage that you provide throughout the year. I think it's always important to make sure we show gratification for the work that you guys do, how often you guys are on the road and away from families. But more specifically how you guys get to know our players intimately and tell their stories as people.

There's not a lot of true journalists out there right now who do that and take the time, so I definitely want to thank you all in this room for doing that. Our guys feel that, and they appreciate that.

Today I'll share a few focuses of ours going into the upcoming season, probably give you an update on player health, as I'm sure that's a topic you guys want me to touch on, but I'll be here, I'll answer any questions you guys have, but first, I think it's important for me to speak to our fans, address them and really just shine some light because they are our energy drivers.

For us, I try to spend as much time as I can getting to know our fan base, and a few things are very, very clear. Our fans, they're loyal. Our fans, they're passionate. They are knowledgeable, and they are fully committed. Their support matters.

I feel it. Our players feel it. The coaching staff feels it. All of us, we really, really do. I just want the fans to know that your commitment doesn't go unnoticed. Keep standing in there with us. Our group put a ton of work in this off-season, and they did so with you all in mind.

I think that connection with this city, the whole DMV area, the fan base, this team, it's just real, and I want to make sure that we keep building on that, and our players are intentional in making sure that happens this year.

Now, at the same time, we're definitely realists. We know

that we have a lot more work to do. We've got a lot of ground to cover as an organization, but I feel like we're heading in the right direction, but know that we embrace that challenge every single day. We have the same mindset, everybody when they walk into the building, what can we do today to take another step forward towards achieving our goals, and that's the mindset that staff, players, everyone has.

We do know that we're rebuilding under Michael Winger's leadership. Our front office is a little over two years here now. We have a very clear vision for where we're going, and we've developed a plan to get there. Know that.

Also know that rebuilding, it isn't easy, nor is it linear. I know you guys have heard me use those words before. We know it's not just hard on the players going through it, but it's hard on you guys as fans too. But I want you to know that you guys can trust that we're laying a foundation here that will make us more sustainable. It'll make us more flexible and more consistent over time, and that's the goal, and we're committed to that.

We will not skip steps. We will not take shortcuts. It truly is about creating something that you all can be proud of and something that can last.

Know we're doing some heavy lifting behind the scenes, more on our infrastructure and ways that we can create lasting and meaningful change. But though the path, I would say, is probably challenging, based on where we started, we feel like it's the right thing for us to do, and again, we're fully dedicated to seeing this plan through.

With that, looking ahead to the season, I'd tell the fans we're excited to continue to learn, learn about our coaches, our players, us as an organization. I'd tell the fans, stay with us as we all appreciate and go through the highs and the lows and go through the growth moments in between. Keep bringing the energy that you guys bring. Keep pushing us forward as we rebuild this thing together.

With that, I'll do my best to turn my journalism hat back on from my college days and try to get in front of the questions

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that I anticipate you guys will be asking, save everybody a little time here.

For me, I enjoy the off-season. It's when we get to do a little bit more of the work behind the scenes and develop as an organization and a staff and really take some time to do some deep thinking on where you want to go.

I thought it was a busy off-season but a productive one for sure. It started with the reimagining of CapitalOne Arena, literally right after the season. I do want to thank Ted for leading the charge and supporting us and making things here first class for our players, for their families.

We did some renovations here at MHPC, but what you guys will see when you go down to CapitalOne Arena, I walked the spaces yesterday, it is tremendous. Obviously we've got a little bit more work to do, but what it's going to allow for our staff, for our players, their families, obviously it's a huge upgrade for us, but functionally we'll be able to do more work and do better work.

Then I walked the spaces of the visitors locker room, the media space, the referees. Everything is first class. High, high level, you guys will experience that moving forward, and I think that was a part of the reimagination, not just for us but for everyone that walks into CapitalOne Arena.

Big shout-out to Jordan and Darius and their teams for the time that they're putting in, everybody that's working and doing double and triple shifts to make sure we get it done on time. Not an easy task to do in the off-season, but it's tremendous, and I can't wait for our fans to feel that.

I think it's a couple years away from you guys feeling it as much as we will because we're doing it two more summers, but the reimagination is going to be awesome, and thanks to everyone involved on that.

I would say roster-wise, we're still in the early phases of the rebuild, and I think this off-season we decided to lean into the youth movement even more, if you could. I'd say going into training camp, we do not have the same level of experience or established players as we've had in the previous ones, which is fine. We do, however, have depth, and I know we like the unpredictability and the competition that we think it's going to breed.

For us, we view the upcoming season as a season of opportunity, and I've talked to the players about that, the staff about that. A lot of the growth happens behind closed doors. You guys know many of our intentional environmental gains we're trying to make, but we also want to see that reflected on the floor a little bit more this year.

I think we have a roster full of players who, for different reasons, haven't necessarily reached their prime or their upside and they have a lot of room to grow, whether that's opportunity, whether that's just age, and we like that about our roster because it has a further runway.

I've told them that at some point they'll all be given their opportunity and chances to take steps, and as a front office, we're hoping that people separate themselves. That's what we're looking for this season.

We are not naïve; we understand that going through a rebuild, not every player that you see on the roster is going to be a part of the journey when we get to where we're trying to get to, but that's on us to take inventory every single day, realize where we're at, and as an evaluation staff, as a strategy staff, come up with the right questions and try to get those answered. That's what we're going to do this season.

Guys will have their opportunity to play and grow and become a part of what we're trying to do moving forward.

Again, this off-season felt different. I know I can say for me personally, it was the first time where it felt like home, I'd say. It was the first off-season where you're home and the family is adapted and they're playing with friends and they're going back to the same school, and I know my wife and my kids, it felt like home for us.

I know with BK and his staff having a second off-season to really talk through schemes and just be more comfortable, I think it's nine players were in training camp last year, so again, there's some continuity there, second time coming back through it. It just helps with communication, style of play and everything that you're trying to do.

I just think we're further ahead coming into this training camp in those specific areas.

Then obviously when you have the veterans that we have that we're fortunate to have, guys like CJ, Khrist, Corey, Marvin and Anthony Gill, those guys are huge in bridging the gap and experience but also the lessons and the competitiveness on the court, so we're lucky to have those guys. I think the kind of leadership that they bring can really help foster the growth that we're looking for.

I know me, I like the fact that we're the third youngest team in the NBA going into the season. We'll see how that is at the end of the season, but I like the fact that we're the third youngest team going into the NBA who had a decent amount of turnover in the off-season. But when you look at it, we're still returning 72 percent of our minutes post All-Star break. That's above league average, and for me,



the two go hand in hand.

The opportunity that is ahead is enhanced by the continuity that we have, and that's rare for such a young team, and we're going to embrace that this season.

In the off-season as a front office, you're always trying to find ways to win the margins, whether that's winning the margins in staffing, whether that's winning the margins in strategy, roster management. I think we did a tremendous job winning the margins in facilities, improvements and things of that nature. Those things were goals of ours, and they're always key, but understand that the lifeblood of everything that we do in the summer, in the off-season, is player growth and player development.

I was really impressed with the approach of our players and our staff this summer. I felt like they really didn't leave. Most of the guys went away for three weeks and were back in May and only really left for vacation or to go play with their national teams. That dedication, the same room that I addressed them with when they got back here, I challenged them, they have 170 days to maximize themselves and how are they going to do it, and to a man, I can say they embraced that. They accepted that.

The jump season was intense. We call it jump season, not the off-season, because we anticipate our players taking jumps, and they really did both physically and mentally. A lot of them changing the composition of their body, some naturally, some are still growing, just tall, getting taller, but also just body mass and the proper weight that you're supposed to be adding. A lot of guys were intentional in that.

I joked with them that they turned MHPC, our practice facility, and CareFirst Arena into a 24-Hour Fitness this year. These guys were in in the morning, back at night.

The Mystics had a very fun run, and I loved being in the building with them, so when the Mystics were practicing at MHPC we set up the court over here, set up the weight room so we didn't miss a step.

So thank you to everybody that would put it up on a non-game day, put it right back down, so it's a big supportive group that supports our players and everything that went into their jump season, so thanks for everything that went into that.

With as many guys playing EuroBasket and AmeriCup, it was important for us to not necessarily go out to LA or Miami like we did last year, but guys were here. They stayed here and they maximized that.

I thought our veterans crushed Vegas, showing up in big numbers. We traveled on the road pretty well, and we'd bring our own court, we'd bring our own setup, have a Wizards whole hub up there, and everyone showed up and showed out, so that was fun.

Again, they've all been here since the beginning of September, aside from the guys that were playing internationally. But they returned soon right after, so that was great. Our guys have bonded. They've been around. I told them the work and the confidence shows up in the dark when people aren't watching, and they took advantage of that. The best part about them coming back in September is obviously they don't have to be here, they wanted to be here, and not just on the court, they were in the community.

These guys were going, handing out backpacks, school drives, on 9/11 going and spending time with the fire department and the police department, just giving back to the community service members, and that's on their own accord because that's who they are, that's who we are, and I thank them for that. They didn't have to do that. That's just what we do and that's what we'll continue to do.

Again, our guys have been here. They embrace the city. I think this bond with our fan base is only going to continue to grow, and I'm excited for where we're at.

You guys like to often ask me about expectations, so I don't want to skip over that question. I'll try and answer it ahead of time here. I'll answer it by saying the things that I'm personally looking for this season.

I want us to be a more connected team, more resilient group and a more confident group, and I think that can show up in a lot of different ways. As a team when we got together and talked about what we want to be known for for the season, a lot of those things came up.

I would say with us having a more dense roster but less heavy or veteran dependent group, I expect to see a lot more competition in camp. I want guys to have energy. I want guys to get after it and really compete and try to go earn some minutes and take some people's minutes ahead of them, even if there is a hierarchy right now, which I'm not sure there is, but I also expect that throughout the season, throughout the season during practices. We have the bodies, we have the depth, we have the youth to really get better and practice hard this season.

I challenged them on that. That's my expectation. Again, we'll invest in the young players. We'll probably set some more records in terms of lineups and age, and that's okay. We've got to meet everybody where we're at right now.



But with that opportunity and that availability, I'd like to see players, like I said, take a step and separate themselves.

I anticipate us using the Go-Go a little bit more, especially early on in the season. Probably more so with that depth that we'll see at the wing spot. If guys were healthy last year, we got banged up in camp unfortunately, and a lot of the rookies had to step in and play, and they played well and earned it and stayed in the lineup.

If everything goes well, I anticipate trusting head coach Cody Topper, Jonathan Waller, our GM. They've done a tremendous job hiring a staff that is high-level former players with upside who compete and get on the floor and really teach our guys.

I think our Go-Go have done a really good job developing our two-way players and the opportunities that they have there. They'll probably have a little bit more opportunity at the beginning of the year with some of the wings as well. I don't know who that'll be. That'll kind of take care of itself, but I have full confidence in the connectedness between the two organizations, and I look forward to kind of how we maximize that this season and the challenge to use that a little bit differently, which will be fun.

Again, like last year, I expect our team to take time to form and time to take shape. At the end of the day, my anticipation is that -- and expectation is that we get better every single month, both individually and as a group, and by the time we get to the end of the season, whenever that is, we have more answers going into an important off-season than we had coming in. That's kind of where I'm at on that.

My last journalism guess would be health update. Is that a question you guys have?

Longer list than I would have hoped. I'll finish with the start of last season. So Corey's thumb, completely healthy, healed. He's here, ready to go, feeling good.

Summer League, Tre and Will both dealt with injuries, Tre with a hamstring. He's cleared, healthy, playing, good to go. Will's thumb is healthy, cleared, good to go.

Staying with the thumb theme, I guess, Bilal injured his thumb playing EuroBasket. He actually had a checkup today. He'll be reevaluated again in a couple weeks. The anticipation with him is that he'll miss training camp and probably be good to go around that first or second week in the season. But we'll have a little bit more information in the next coming week on that.

Alex also was injured playing with Team France in

EuroBasket, a calf injury. He'll miss the beginning of training camp, but we're hopeful that he'll see some time towards the end of that.

AJ has a leg bruise that he's dealing with right now. I don't anticipate it to be too serious, but you might not see him going full go at the start of training camp, but again, he'll be available at some point during the preseason.

Tristan the last couple games didn't play EuroBasket because he injured his hamstring, but he came back and is good to go and full go, so he'll be ready to play to start training camp.

I think that's the list of updates on injuries, but if you guys can think of any others, I'll try to answer that for you. But again, none of this stuff is long-term or too concerning. They're just basketball contact injuries. We're looking forward to ripping and running and being good to go pretty much at the start of the season.

With that, I'll open it up and be here to answer any questions you guys have.

Q. You talked about opportunity and depth, and obviously this team has a plethora of different wings, et cetera, and you mentioned the fact that there will be battles in practice and camp to help differentiate who gets the allotment of minutes. What other metrics are going to be used to try to define who's going to be able to play, especially considering the healthy guys that will be returning?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think it's good, actually, to have some of those opportunities early because of some of the injuries. You'll get an opportunity to see some of the younger guys get out there and compete.

Again, we have a lot of internal metrics that we'll be looking at. For us, we're really about competition this year and defending and getting after it.

For us as a team, we want to continue to be fast, continue to keep our pace. We want to pass the ball more, take the ball more, take more efficient shots. We think we have a group that can do that, but again, we're going to start on the defensive end and make sure we get after it and make other teams feel us and have a little bit more of a presence. That's kind of the standard we're looking for from a lot of our guys, and BK does a tremendous job of giving guys opportunity at the right time.

I think you'll see different lineups. I think you might see a different lineup that starts the second half that didn't start the first half and just use that creativity and the evolution of



the NBA. You'll see two bigs, you'll see a couple smalls out there.

Again, we have some versatility and we've got some guys with some physical toughness that can go out there and compete, so I'm looking forward to seeing what he does with it.

Q. My follow-up question, AJ Johnson, to your point, he seems to be very at home. Now we've integrated a guy who's from here who's now on the team in Cam Whitmore. Your thoughts how he's going to be integrated into the team and what he can do?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think Cam has integrated himself well. We've been fortunate to have him since July. He's a kid that knows what D.C. basketball is about. He's proud to be back here and help define what Wizards basketball is going to be known for moving forward. I think everybody in that room is excited for that challenge.

But he's someone that we add to our deep wing group who went through the draft process with Bilal. He obviously didn't get as much opportunity in Houston for whatever reason, but he understands that he's going to have opportunity here, but it's got to be earned, and I don't know when that's going to come, but he's excited.

He's a powerful, explosive, dynamic athlete who can compete on both ends. We've got to get him to be consistent, but he's going to score, put the ball in the hole and make his teammates better and as a whole make the group better.

We're excited to have Cam. Talking to Anthony Gill about the summer and the new guys, he said Cam has fit in great and is kind of pushing the group, which is exactly why we went and traded for him.

Q. What did you learn from Bub Carrington last year in terms of how he presented as a rookie, and how do you want to see him build upon the experience and the opportunity that he gleaned last year as well?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, the consistency in who he is and showing up every day, I know he played all 82 games. Not everyone gets to do that. But the mindset to get better and improve. There's a few guys who were here all summer, and Bub is one of those guys.

When we're looking at the amount of lifts that these guys did in the off-season, a few of them were over 50 lifts in this building. That's pretty hard to do in the off-season, obviously, when you travel and when you go to Vegas and all the other stuff and you played Summer League. So he

was committed. He's a committed individual. He wants to grow. He wants to lead. He's vocal. He's a tough kid, and he brings it every single day, and we're going to ask him to continue to do that.

He knows the opportunity that's ahead, and he's going to embrace it and go after it. I'm very happy with who Bub is as a person but how he manifests that every day when he walks through the door.

Q. With Corey, the same thing, you kind of grouped him in with the veteran names --

WILL DAWKINS: The 26-year-old vet in there, yeah.

Q. What do you want to see from Corey this year in terms of on the court and execution and maybe the evolution of his skill set?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, Corey is someone that we're really excited about, as you know. When we came through the deconstruction phase, one of the two players that remained were Corey and Anthony Gill for who they are but also what they can do on the basketball court. Corey is someone who has been through different coaches, been through different regimes and is starting to figure out BK's style towards the end of last season. We kind of saw him make those gains before he got injured. He's definitely more comfortable now, the way he can finish, the way he can stretch the floor but also the defensive gains he made. Corey is still getting better as a player, and that's exciting for us. He's going to have a huge impact on the team this year.

Q. Will, there's the plan that you come into any season with and there's the plan that you actually have to deal with. I just wonder, where is the kind of outside time frame as you see it right now for when this thing will be sufficiently turned around where you'll have the group that you want, you'll have the players that you want? And some of that's out of your control, I understand --

WILL DAWKINS: For sure.

Q. -- and this thing will be kind of self-sustaining in the way that contending teams tend to start to win and continue to win?

WILL DAWKINS: Good question. You study a lot of these. I know Michael and I have been through these. I've been through a couple myself, and they're all different. With us, we're still definitely at the early, early phases of that.

I think outside we're probably a little further ahead than

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where we feel like we are internally, but I will say where we've made the biggest gains is in the infrastructure and in the people supporting the organization, the culture of the building, the DNA, the substance of the people that we've brought in and the mentality. So I think that stuff, when the age and the talent things catch up, it makes it a little easier to push go.

But again, we're going to follow our players. It's going to be guys we continue to draft moving forward who obviously will be a part of that, a lot of luck in the draft and lottery and things of that nature, but the players we have in house are going to dictate how far we go and where we go, and we've got a lot of guys that we're going to take opportunities on, and we hope that people separate themselves and push through and become those leaders and carry-forward players for us, but I expect we'll have more answers at the end of the season on that.

Q. I don't know if you subscribe to the notion that by year three you pretty much are who you're going to be in the NBA. You may not. But you've got two guys in Bilal and Cam particularly who are in year three now. Where is the jump going to come from from those two, if it comes this year?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think that not necessarily saying you agree with that, but I think that thing is a little antiquated because it kind of started when guys were sophomores and juniors coming out of college and it was like three years in. Bilal just turned 21, so it's not a normal year three. He'll be 21 all season.

Same with Cam, he's 21 years old and doesn't have that same level of experience.

I would say both of those guys are on pace based on what we've seen and what we believe. Bilal specifically, it's 2025; if we take a step back two years ago, 2023, this guy is playing like Espoir, junior level basketball in France. They have some injuries, he gets a chance to play Pro A, plays well, becomes a lottery pick, plays in the Olympics, plays in the NBA. He's done really, really well for where he's at, obviously being a Rising Star two times.

When we drafted him, we knew that the defense was going to be ahead of the offense, but we loved his versatility, and within two years he's become a defensive menace.

When you look at the numbers, he's guarded the best players in the NBA, the best scorers in the league, last season more than anyone in the NBA. So the reps and experience he's getting is huge.

But not only the reps, but he's holding those guys below

their average in efficiency. So he's having a big impact on a team that was a pretty poor defensive team last year. We got better as the season went on and we'll continue to get better. But again, he's having that impact in year two before he's physically close to where he's going to be. We know we have the runway there.

He's got some things he's going to continue to improve on and work on, but again, the versatility that he shows as a ball handler and creator, there's three guys under 21 that had a triple-double last year; he's one of them. The other guy is pretty good, too.

Again, we feel very confident where he is. He's grown in the national team and taking steps here. He knows what's in front of him. I wouldn't say year three is a make-or-break definable year for him just because of where he is in his basketball journey. He's pretty young compared to guys who are coming out after junior or sophomore year.

Again, we feel really good about that, and Cam probably hasn't got the opportunities and the minutes normal for guys who have gone through the first two years, so again, he's probably further along from getting to where you have those answers. But it's on us to make those answers because we've got some decisions to make next off-season as well, or create those answers.

So we'll be looking forward to it, but we have a lot of confidence in both those guys, and those are two players that I know I really liked in the draft process, but our evaluation group, as well, so we're happy to have both of them.

Q. You're well aware your of team struggles defensive rebounding last year, and now several of the people who were your best defensive rebounders, Valanciunas, Kuzma, are gone. How do you expect your young players to develop if your team once again struggles to rebound the ball on the defensive end?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think it's a willpower thing. It's a mindset thing. It's an energy thing. We know there's going to be areas where we're going to be in towards the second half in the league, but you have to find ways as a team to counteract that and use your ability to switch, use your ability to guard, keep guys out of the paint.

We were pretty good in terms of contesting at the rim. We've got to be more a unit, we've got to be more competitive on the glass. Bilal can rebound. I think Coach is going to put something in there where you rebound it, you can bring it up, like incentivize them to go to the glass.



But again, we understand we're going to be deficient in some areas just based on the youth and experience and physicality. Rebounding is one of those areas. I think we were dead last two years ago, and we were 26th or something towards the end of the season last year. It's an area we will improve upon, but I think it starts with the mindset and finding ways to counteract that defensively to be a more well-rounded defensive team.

Q. I think this is our first opportunity to speak to you on record since the Jordan Poole-Saddiq trade. Why did your team make that move?

WILL DAWKINS: The way we look at every roster move is strategically what it does for you, how it sets you up for the future, but also style of play, what it does for your roster, and that move specifically we felt really good about of how it's going to position us to have flexibility in the future.

But more importantly, what it does to our style of play and the players that we were able to bring in in that trade. As we talked about earlier, Cam was someone we've targeted for the last three years and got an opportunity to bring in in that trade, and then you're adding a career 40 percent three-point shooter in C.J. McCollum who's an everyday guy, consistent, can score, can defend, can make plays, and stylistically fits the group really well.

Again, it's hard to lose some of those players that you lose in a trade like that who have added to the fiber and the DNA of the Wizards, but at the end of the day, we're freeing up opportunities for young players. We're freeing up sustainability and flexibility in the future, while adding two guys that fit our team and have a big runway in Cam.

Q. How do you guys plan to develop Tre Johnson this year?

WILL DAWKINS: Same way we do with both of our players. I think Tre is someone who -- I know I talk about guys being serious craftsmen, but this dude is a serious hooper. He's in the gym. He takes it seriously. He doesn't have a lot of hobbies. We're trying to develop other hobbies outside of basketball. He's going to develop on his own just because he puts so much time in.

But we're intentional on what we're working on, and he'll get opportunities. He'll get reps. He's already improved or I'm a poor evaluator - one or the other - at passing the ball. He's already further ahead on that, and he'll be challenged on the defensive end. But we'll give him reps. We'll give him opportunity.

One thing we know he has is confidence, and one thing we know is he's going to put time in in the gym, so again, it'll

be fully holistic and develop the mental side, the physical side. He's already added four or five pounds. I think he's 199. He didn't get to 200, but I think he's 199. He'll get there. But he's going to take those bumps and bruises, but we're excited for Tre. We really are.

I think there's a lot to him that he'll be able to show and open up once he's here. The fans will love Tre.

Q. It was pretty interesting both you and BK visited Commanders practices I believe on separate occasions. What was your experience like? How did it come about? What do you think you took from it?

WILL DAWKINS: I know I'm a huge football fan so I appreciate you throwing that one in there. BK went for OTAs, which was actually better because he got to be around the coaching staff and sit in meetings with the Commanders. Myself, our head of strategy, Michael Hartman, Jonathan Wall, our GM of the Go-Go, we went to practice, got to talk with Mr. Peters and his group and just exchange ideas, and they're doing things really well over there at the Commanders. It's important for me to reach out and be a part of the community, especially with a strong fan support system and strong multisport.

We talk to the Nationals. We talk to the Orioles. We spend time talking to the Spirit and going to their game, D.C. United. I've reached out and have a relationship with a lot of front offices, and the Commanders are doing things really well there, and they have a lot of support.

There's things I can learn from a lot of people that have been here longer than I have, so I ask as many questions as I can and we try to collaborate, and some of their players are huge basketball fans, some of our guys are huge football fans. They gave us a suite for the game on Sunday. We had like 40 people go. It was pretty cool.

Again, I'm a huge football guy. I try to go as much as I can and support the local teams, and I think it's good for everybody to share ideas, and that's what it's all about.

Q. You talked about the growth in infrastructure that you guys have made. Can you give us an example of an area where you've seen that growth and you've seen a lot of return?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah. When Michael and I first got here, we kind of assessed where we were at in terms of staffing, in terms of allocating funds towards player development, towards renovating the buildings.

I think when you talk about adding a biomechanics lab here this off-season, you talk about creating departments that



didn't exist before we got here in terms of player pathways and enrichment, really investing in the families, investing in the players' post careers, or inventing a department about experience, so making sure people have a shared, fun, enjoyable experience when they get here, that stuff necessarily wasn't here.

To be able to have the resources to add staffing and do different things here, the players feel that when they come in. They feel like it's more of a player-driven first-class organization, so I think that infrastructure is really, really important, but there's more continuity. We know what our pillars are. We know what we're about. We're speaking the same language, and that wasn't the case when we first walked in. Rightfully so; we were all from different areas. But we've defined that now, and that's why I say the foundation is there, the infrastructure is there to build upon. It's really sturdy, and now we've just got to lay the right bricks.

We're all speaking the same language, moving in the right direction and putting our players first.

Q. At the end of last season you said that you guys were still at the corner of deconstruction and laying the foundation. Do you still believe you're there?

WILL DAWKINS: We're not too much further removed from that, yeah.

Q. What would you need to see this season, next season to say that you guys have progressed to the next stage with the rebuild?

WILL DAWKINS: I think a lot of it will kind of play out when we watch our players on the court in development and style of play and what they can take on. If you can imagine back to when our players were rookies and younger, first part of the month in the regular season they were a lot different than they were at the end of the season.

I would say a lot of the questions you're going to have, a lot of the questions our fans are going to have, we have the same ones. So we'll be watching for that, and hopefully, like you said, like I said, we'll have some people separate themselves and make it really clear and obvious when we need to push that button.

Q. What do you want to see with Alex Sarr this season as far as playing with consistent energy on the court?

WILL DAWKINS: I would say he played with a consistent energy last year. For me, I was very excited for the season that Alex had last year. To be first-team all-rookie, we don't want to take that away from the guy. The guy had a

really, really impactful season.

Again, with him, two years ago, it's OTE. People didn't know what OTE was. After that, he's in Perth, Australia, and then he's here in the NBA, the No. 2 pick, and when we drafted him, we told you that the versatility is what we like about him. We knew his defense was going to be ahead of his offense.

Did I know he'd be the high-level impact defender that he was year one? I did not. But I was very, very impressed with that. A guy who has the slender build, likes to play with the ball and is skilled to be fifth or sixth, whatever it was in blocks last year but also to be second in rim contest, so he's going after everything. Some of that is our defense; we need to be better on the perimeter and stop with the rim attacks. But to be five or six in blocks and No. 2 in contests, he's getting after it. He's impacting the game.

Then what we love most about him is he does that at the rim and then he can go out and switch. For us, when we learned the numbers, he was the number one most efficient switch defender in the NBA last year on anybody that had over 200 attempts. Alex was balling last year, especially on the defensive end.

On the offensive end you saw the versatility. So again, I think the consistency and the effort will get better, but it was there. You can't watch him play and say that that wasn't the case.

For him to be in the rare air of a rookie to have 100 blocks but also 100 assists and 100 threes - the other two guys that have done that are pretty good as well - he's a versatile skilled player. He'll get more efficient. He'll get more physical. He's grown half an inch. The guy is still growing.

But he's further away from being the physical center that everybody, I think, wants more from him, but he's a skilled basketball player, and he's only going to get better.

What he did in year one league rankings is pretty impressive. Happy for him and what he accomplished, but he wants a lot more, and we want it for him. So we're excited to see what he does year two.

Q. Back to Cam Whitmore, you've spoken on how high you are on him and how long you've been high on him. I did want to know, what did you make of that he's 21, first-round pick, but Houston was still willing to trade him to you all?

WILL DAWKINS: I thought it was good for us. It's hard to



put yourself in other people's shoes, and they have a lot going on, and I think they're at a more competitive area than we are in terms of more win-now mode.

So as a front office, organization, we want to be flexible to be able to take those shots and to help other teams achieve their goals while we're going through the rebuild. That's important to us.

Our evaluators, they grind, they work. Our pro group stayed on it. You kind of pass the baton. It's like, hey, grass-roots watch you in high school, they pass the baton on to the amateur guys when they watch you in the NCAA or pros. You become a pro, you pass that folder on to the pro guys, and his name is popping every single place.

So they're going and watching his G-League games, they're going and watching his workouts pregame, and we don't lose sight of who he is.

I can vividly remember a conversation I had with him on draft day, and it was if we take you, can you handle being home and everything that comes with it. You know what Washington basketball is about. Like can you handle that. We've referenced that conversation the moment we traded for him.

But again, other teams have pressures and demands, and we're here to kind of help facilitate that from time to time, but on that we were aggressive. He was the player we wanted.

Q. One player I don't believe has been touched on yet is Kyshawn, and it's a deep room on the wing, as you mentioned. What can he do to set himself aside in that room, and what jumps are you looking for him to make this year?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I appreciate you asking about Ky. He's had as good a summer as anyone I would say in terms of buying into the jump season. He's been here as much as most. Didn't go back home too often other than just to run a camp, get back to the kids and come right back.

He's taken a jump physically. I think when you guys see his shoulders and his body, the lean body mass he's been able to add on is pretty good. Again, Ky is 21. He's 21 years old. He's taken a jump in terms of leadership and bonding and getting guys to be together, so he's stepping up in those areas.

But he's not just a wing, he's a basketball player. You can play him 1 through 4 and he knows what to do. He's going to compete.

I really enjoyed watching him take the opportunity with Team Canada this summer. Going down to Nicaragua to be around him and be around those practices and see his mindset putting the ball in his hands, making decisions, he's going to grow from those experiences, and we feel very fortunate to have Ky on the roster, and again, he's someone that's going to push the group and try to fortify himself, and we challenged him to do that.

Q. With Bub Carrington, you mentioned how good it was to see him constantly in the gym this summer. Last year obviously he had to play a little bit more of an off-ball role just with Jordan taking a lot of the point guard reps. This season are you looking for him to play more on ball, and how do you expect that development for him to go into year two?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think it will be more natural. Probably a question that BK can dive into a little bit more, but I think we want to see multiple ball handlers. We do want to continue to experiment and see what guys can do off ball, on the wing. Even Summer League, when you watch that, I thought you saw guys trying different things, Kyshawn posting up, Bub playing off wing in pick-and-roll, Alex literally being the handler in pick-and-roll, so we'll try a lot of that stuff throughout the year.

But I do anticipate Bub having the ball in his hands a good amount.

Q. Looking at the competition that you speak of and trying to balance the vets' egos, whether old or young, coming to play at some point, how do you try to balance that and keep everybody understanding what the plan is, the development of the young guys, the guys in their second year with the opportunities they got last year, getting used to maybe not getting as many minutes this year potentially?

WILL DAWKINS: For sure. I guess I'd take you into the room when I talk to the team a little bit. I said, I'm going to ask a bunch of different questions; what do you want me to say about our team? What do you want the fans to know? What do you want the media to know about your team. The veteran group, rookie group, middle-aged players, whatever you want to call them, we had everybody in there. To a man, they were like, we are going to compete this year. We're going to be in practice, we're going to compete in games, we're going to earn the respect of our opponents and we're going to earn the respect of the fans. And that's important to them.

Defining Wizards basketball and what it looks like moving forward is an opportunity that they're embracing. It's a



challenge but it's also a huge opportunity, and with that comes a lot of competition, and I told them last year, a lot of stuff was given more than earned. This year that can't be the case, and everybody in here has to feel that, and that's what's going to sharpen iron. Iron sharpens iron, and that's kind of what we want to do.

They're embracing it. They're ready to get after it. They're not hiding from it. I literally was like, hey, these rookies got a lot of minutes this year; who's taking their spots. That's the mentality we've got to have, and everybody else's spot -- could be like yeah, that 72 minutes we're returning, I'm getting a piece of that. I think that's why I'm excited for camp, to see who shines and who fights through it. But it's a long season. Everybody is going to get their opportunity.

But the veterans aren't going anywhere. They're going to play and they're going to hold their spots and they're going to make us more competitive, but they're also going to grow the group, and it's also a group because of that. Everyone is on the same page. They know what it is, and they're ready to get after it.

Q. From BK in his second full year, what do you want to see from him with regards to balancing how those minutes go when you've only got a certain amount of minutes to give out?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I don't know if there's a better coach seated for the situation that we're in just because of BK's belief in player development, his belief in getting answers and seeing the big picture, so he's been awesome to work with.

His staff has come together this off-season. They've gone on their own retreats to figure out how we want to play and how we can use these players to the best of their ability and use the small ball lineups and the wings that we have to get some of these answers.

But again, we're going to be judged on are we a more competitive team, are we a more connected team, and the word that we're using is don't blink. Like we're going to be hit with some hard times. We might be younger, we might be less physical, might be down this, might be down that, a bad quarter doesn't turn into a bad game. We don't blink, we don't flinch, we come right back, and that's not something that is an age restriction on us. That's a mentality and an effort thing, and I think you'll hear our guys say, we didn't blink tonight. We got hit, we got punched in the mouth. Not by Bud Crawford, who's pretty elite after watching that fight, but we didn't flinch. Like we came back and we swamped them, and I think that's what we want to see from the team this year, and I think that's what we'll be judging our staff and our organization on this

season.

Q. What do you make of the achilles injuries we've seen around the league, and with someone like Alex with a calf injury, do those have to be managed differently than in the past?

WILL DAWKINS: Yeah, I think it was very unfortunate for the league to have those three stars go down in the Playoffs, all in the Eastern Conference, and really just shape how everything was won this off-season. But again, it's probably more random than you think it's connected, and we do our research and the league obviously does their research.

But with each player, it's different, and with Alex, we're always going to put his player care first and be more on the conservative side.

But we've had looks and second looks and third opinions, and we feel pretty good about where he's at, and we'll take our time and not rush it to make sure he gets back.

Again, it's a tremendous league, a competitive league, and injuries are part of it. I actually enjoyed watching the Playoffs last year and seeing how teams kind of persevered and pushed through that.

But we've talked to the league office and the doctors there, and they're on pace for the amount of injuries as there are per season, and unfortunately it just happened to be those and the timing of those.

But again, we have a high level performance team, Danny Medina and his staff do a really, really good job, and we'll take the players' best interest in mind on everything we do.

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