

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Coach Brian Keefe

Media Conference



BRIAN KEEFE: Because of our roster, things will grow and develop into better rebounders. It's going to have to be a mentality that the ball is ours. We have to go and get it and attack it, and we have to do it as a collective unit. We don't expect it to be one person.

We do think we have a lot of wings and some guards that can rebound well and initiate our offense.

Q. Thinking about the fact that to your point, you do have a lot of wings, how do you try to work out the rotation when you've got guys that took a lot of court time last year with the incorporation of new guys including, Cam Whitmore?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think it's going to be a really healthy, competitive training camp. I think the league is going to have more wings anyways. We'll be able to experiment with lineups. We have versatility and can play in different styles and different ways. Obviously addition of Cam is great, a guy that can bring size and put pressure on the rim.

But I think it just leads to a healthy environment where guys are going to get after it, they can compete. Those are the type of guys we want in our building, so I'm looking forward to tomorrow getting started.

Q. With the young backcourt that you have, the young guards you have, what are you trying to instill in them, especially on the defensive end? Talk about Tre and Bub in particular.

BRIAN KEEFE: I think it's about building the roster. It's about building from day one. We did a lot of that last year, but tomorrow is a new day. That starts with the habit building of how we want to play defensively.

And for those guys that have got size, Bub this is year two. They'll make a jump. And Tre is going to be learning as he goes. But we expect our guys to be competitive to fight, be gritty. The type of things that make a good defensive team.

It's habit building from day one. You can't skip those steps, and that's what we're going to be attacking starting tomorrow.

Q. I asked Will about visiting the Commanders practice. And you obviously did that as well. He said you sat in on some meetings. What was your experience like going there?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, it's things I ask a lot of our players to improve, and you have to recognize I've got a lot of work to do myself. So you try to find out where you can grow as a leader, as a coach. Coach Quinn and his staff invited me to come out to practice, got to sit in with them, watch how they operate. Obviously really impressed with the environment and the culture that they're building.

I think you can always learn stuff from other sports and different people, and this can be from non-sporting areas too. So this is an opportunity for me to grow. Really thankful they gave me an opportunity to be part of what they were doing for a day. Really cool.

Q. Brian, development obviously goes across different areas at different times and people do it at different speeds. How will you measure development of this team this season in terms of building the habits that lead to winning ultimately?

BRIAN KEEFE: That's a great question. First of all, I think the way I can answer is that we've had a really tremendous off-season. We had a lot of days to get better.

When you don't make the playoffs in the situation we are, you have a certain amount of days that you get.

What I'm really proud of our guys is how we attacked it purposely. I think we're starting to establish a standard for how we operate and do things here, how we work. I think you guys obviously are seeing that too.

We have guys returning from last year that I think helped establish that through the summer. A lot of our returning -- I think we have eight or nine guys that were with me in

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training camp last year. So they start establishing how we do things, how we operate, how we work, and then we added guys, obviously our draft picks and some of our trades and free agency. Like we all have guys who love to play, but I think we've established the standard for how we work.

Also like to give a shout out to, A, my coaching staff for all the tremendous work this summer with all of our guys, but also to our medical and performance staff. Tremendous amount of time and care and aid in helping our players' development.

I think that's how we judge ourselves, is that we are building a certain way we do things, a certain way we work. Now we have the opportunity to transmit that into games.

That's what really tomorrow starts with. That's the greatest thing about every team in the league at this time of year, is you all kind of start from zero. You guys have heard me many times, and I'll say this, when we're really good, it always starts you've got to go back to the basics.

So we're going to establish a standard that we have already built, how we operate, how we work. Now it's time to really transform that to the game.

I think that's what we're looking for this year is how can we do that. The I think it still goes back to what we do every day. I think we're going to see more of that transfer to the games for sure.

Q. What will that look like on the floor? If it's improving.

BRIAN KEEFE: I think you're going to see -- I think you saw this probably February 1st on for us last year. Competitive games, close into games, somebody won, somebody lost, establishing the brand we want to play -- more defensive effort, more physicality. Then the style we want to play offensively, which I think you saw the ball moving, the ball was shared.

Obviously we've talked about this, a lot of decision-makers on this team who can initiate, can help make plays. That's how we want to play. I think you're going to see more and more of that this year because now we're going into some of that corporate knowledge. We have that corporate knowledge that, A, how we work, how we prepare, how we do things, but also how we play.

Like I said, we've got nine guys returning that know the system, and then we're going to integrate some guys into it too that I think will be seamlessly into that. But we also know where we are. We know we're still at the beginning

stages of establishing who we are, and we're not afraid to say that.

I think our fans know that we're going to put out the best effort every night, and that's what we're looking for.

Q. When you look at the defensive side of things -- and I know you talked about the details and not skipping steps, but in the first, including preseason, 20 games, what are some non-negotiable strides that you want to see taken starting tomorrow that we can see that progress being made?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think I mentioned that during a stretch last year, I think we were 15th or 16th in defense, but it was disruptions, deflections, increased turnover rate, charges taken. I think our team will have growth in those things.

We also have some youth on our team. That doesn't mean they can't go out there and defend, but there is a learning curve. We saw that from our initial guys in the beginning last year with Alex and Bub and Kyshawn and Bilal in year two. Like there's a learning curve to the NBA, and that's okay because what we're trying to do is build them to be sustainable. That's the goal. No one's hiding that here. We're trying to build something that can be sustainable long term.

So you're going to see guys are going to make mistakes. Is the course correction up quickly? Can we eliminate those things? I think we're going to get better and better at that, but we have a lot of guys we're going to see out there on the roster that have not experienced the NBA.

So there's going to be a learning curve with them, but just like we saw with our guys last year, by the time they got to February, March, they were way better.

That's always what we're looking for, how we're going to play our best basketball at the end of the year.

Q. You mentioned the amount of guys you have returning, but as well too you look at a guy like Khris you got midseason, having him now healthy, the off-season being settled here, how much does it benefit, with the young guys coming in, his leadership, but also to understand the system to try to alleviate some of those missteps or hiccups you may experience?

BRIAN KEEFE: Khris is terrific because he represents the type of person that we want. We want guys who love the game, who attack their craft diligently every day. So he adds to what we are trying to already build. He's obviously



had unbelievable success in his career and is a role model to our players in terms of how you operate, how you train, how you prepare, and then how you play in the games.

I think our guys really leaned on him, so we're really lucky to have him. Obviously we added CJ too, who's in the same mold. I think those guys we added fit the culture of people we want in our building -- guys who love the game, who care about their craft, and are team players. So we're excited to have both those guys.

Q. A couple for you. One, we just saw Bub out there doing his pictures and things, and one thing struck me. He was doing -- they said do this, do that, pretend you're doing this, and they said, your 3-point celebration, and he said no. Then I said something to him just now, and he said, I get back on defense. I see a smile on your face. What does that make you think when you hear that?

BRIAN KEEFE: Good coaching. (Laughter). That's that corporate knowledge -- I'm joking, but he understands what we're doing, what we're about. He's also got a great way about him, as you can tell. He represents the competitiveness that we want in our group. That's all about Bub.

Q. There's a lot of young players, players that just came here that fans may not know as much. What do you want to tell fans that you know about this group so far, maybe some that came last year as you said. Is there an identity that you feel they could be growing towards?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think what our fans didn't know is we have a culture of work. There's been a tremendous amount of work that's been done in the off-season all the way through September, guys bring a lot of hours in. But purposeful work. It's not stuff that's just haphazard. Things are very purposeful. There's a plan for these guys, and they're guys who care and want to get better. Guys we added through the draft, Tre, Will, and Jamir, they fit our culture, what we're trying to build, the type of people they want in our environment, guys who are in the gym all the time.

We feel those are the guys who are going to help us build to be a sustainable winner. Obviously they bring each unique things that they do in terms of their skill set, but the most important part is their character. We're really impressed with their character.

Q. Will Dawkins told us last week that more had to be given than earned this year. How do you plan on enforcing that to guys who have been through

preseason before and the young guys who maybe haven't been in the NBA before?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think it starts in camp. I think we talked about we have a pretty deep roster in a lot of ways in terms of some guys who are capable of playing and getting the experience. I think a lot of that will be determined through training camp and how we build that out, but I think it will be a very competitive training camp, and I think that's always a good thing. Competition breeds improvement. You've got to be challenged.

We're going to challenge each other. We're going to challenge them. They're going to challenge me. I think that's the way we're going to attack this training camp for sure.

Q. With regards to the overall leadership dynamic, having those young players in year one and two last year getting a lot of minutes on the court, what kind of focality do you want to see from them? Even with the experienced players on the floor, how do you balance that, if you will, to continue to pour into the younger players in terms of using their voices?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think the biggest thing for me is that, when we identified a lot of those guys, we talked about the draft last year, the three guys we drafted plus Bilal, we already have Corey on the roster, then Anthony Gill has been here.

Those guys are the ones who establish how we work. So when we bring in Will and Tre and Jamir, there's a standard for how we do things now.

That's really a lot of credit to our players in how they train, prepare, get after it every day very purposely. Those guys were going to do that anyways because those are the type of guys we want, but then when they walk in here like, oh, this is a culture of work. This is like an environment like, oh, this is intense.

So everybody leads differently, but what I've been most pleased with -- this is one of the things I've been most pleased with in the off-season is all those guys played Summer League and wanted to play Summer League and wanted to improve. They wanted to set the tone for how we do things in practice.

So when those guys came in here, they felt like, oh, this is how the Wizards operate, and that's continued through the rest of the summer.

I think that's where their leadership stands out most. Everybody is going to find their own unique voice. To me

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it's what you do every day. Those are the real leaders, and I'm very impressed with the guys we brought in here and the example they've shown.

Q. You and Will both talked about the increased competition that you're going to see in training camp this year. What are the battles that you're looking forward to seeing play out?

BRIAN KEEFE: You always try to get me to answer something specific, and you know I never answer. (Laughter).

I like to see all of it. I think this is -- sports is competition. They keep a score for a reason. I think for me we're now getting to the stages where that's healthy. Like we want to see that.

That's my responsibility as a coach is to create an environment and training sessions that can do that. Keeping scores, rewarding defense, those type of things. Those are the only things that we (indiscernible).

Anything specific, I think those things just come out in terms of like, okay, who's going to separate themselves? Eventually we're going to have guys who are going to do that, and I think that's what this year is about, and this is what this next three weeks is about for us.

Q. Will talked specifically about the wing battle with Kyshawn having emerged late last year, Cam coming in. Bilal started most of last year, missed most of -- all of training camp. When he comes back from injury, is he going to slot right back into that starting spot, or is that something he has to earn back?

BRIAN KEEFE: I have not thought one minute about minutes or starting for anybody. All I'm focused on is the day today. Tomorrow we've got practice, playing pretty defensive focused practice. We're going to attack that. Those things always kind of take care of themselves. I don't try to preplan those things. I'll come to that eventually, but Bilal will be a big part of what we're doing. I know that for sure.

Q. You have a team largely comprised of players who are still looking for their first big NBA contracts. How do you manage that?

BRIAN KEEFE: Just the day to day. You can't get ahead of yourself. If you're worried about and thinking about those type of things, that usually doesn't go well. We focus on the day to day here. How can you get better every day? I don't worry about that with our guys. It's not even a thought I would even have because that's the type of

people we have here in our building.

Q. What are your impressions of Cam Whitmore, and what do you want to see him focus on?

BRIAN KEEFE: It's been great getting to know him as a person. Really enjoyed having him in our environment. He's obviously someone we thought really highly of.

I know Will and (indiscernible) talked about that in the Draft process a few years ago. Someone we've kept an eye on, his physicality and athleticism, dynamic ability to attack the rim, somebody who can attack the rim. We're really excited to see him in our environment. Really pleased to have Cam.

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