

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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C.J. McCollum

Media Conference



Q. First of all, welcome to D.C. Just your thoughts about this team, the organization, obviously a lot of young players but you know your role in it. How do you see this part of the season, especially heading into camp being something that's going to work out?

C.J. McCOLLUM: Yeah, I'm excited. I've been here for a little bit, spent some time with the guys in the summer in Vegas, just started, came back a few weeks ago to get some work in with the guys. Obviously I know DV (Vanterpool) really well. We were together in Portland, still one of my good friends to this day. So I'm happy to be back with him.

Had some good conversations with (indiscernible) Coach. So just excited about the youth, the talent, the energy, guys knowing what I'm all about. I believe in growth. I believe in opportunity. I think we have a lot of that that will occur this year.

Obviously I've been in the league a long time, so I like to compete, I like to compete at a high level, preparation, I like to say how I got to that today.

They've got a lot of staff here. I'm still learning a lot of names. It's like a crash course on 100 new faces, 100 new names, and the guys are asking questions. Obviously they're going to see how I work and how I got to where I'm at within this league in terms of the respect that I have but also how I play.

I think they'll learn a lot from me just by being around but also with me helping out and explaining why I do things the way I do, how I prepare the way I do, why I get in at the times that I do and taking care of my body and mind and just becoming a professional.

I'm 20 years older than a lot of them. I can't even give them advice (laughing). It's going to be funny just to see the conversations, the music, all those types of things. But they're really talented guys, they love to work.

And I told them today, I told Coach BK, I've been in the

league a long time and obviously I've heard a lot about the organization and some of the changes that they've made from the past, and I've never been on a team where guys work out on media day, like it's scheduled. It's optional, but there's 20 guys in the building, G League included, where guys are getting after it. The 20-year-olds like to work, 21-year-olds, and obviously Khris and I are the oldest on the team and we love to work, too. So it's just a great environment to be a part of.

Q. Since we're doing the names and introductions, I asked Khris this earlier about balancing out your veteran experience and your own individual priorities with helping grow and develop the young guys.

C.J. McCOLLUM: I love to compete. I love to get after it. I think for me it's just about being a pro and approaching the game the right way every day, maximizing my talents, obviously, and that will come with preparation, that will come with getting in early, getting what I need for my body, getting what I need for my mind and going out there and doing what's asked of me and doing it at a high level. Historically that's what I've done. I've been able to adapt and I play different roles.

I've played obviously alongside some great players. Obviously New Orleans was a lot of young talent and I did different stuff, on the ball, off the ball. I'm comfortable in all those situations. I can score, obviously. I know how to lead. I know how to follow.

So I've played a lot of different roles throughout my career, and I think individually when you do things the right way and you live with good intention, I think usually it works out for you.

I never really set statistical goals. It's like I want to be as efficient as possible. I want to be in great shape and I'm in great shape. I took 21 days off to start the season. My last game was March 22nd. We lost to the Detroit Pistons, and then I had a foot bruise and I ended up not playing the rest of the year. So I've had a lot of time off to recover, the longest summer I've ever had in my career. So I've been able to train a lot, work on things that I haven't been able to

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work on in the past, and I'm excited to play. I'm excited to play at a high level and excited to play alongside some really good young talent.

But in terms of individual goals, I'm going to compete at a high level. I'm going to hoop. I think the rest is going to be what it's going to be.

Q. When you step into a situation, and I know in New Orleans you had a lot of young guys as well, but as a vet, what do you want to be able to take away from this young group for yourself, and what do you also hope they take away from you as you progress throughout this season?

C.J. McCOLLUM: I think what I'll take away for me, just my approach. There's a lot of different ways to be successful in this league, but that consistency matters. So what time you get to the gym, what are you working on when you work out, are you getting your table work in, are you lifting, what are you eating, are you getting your sleep.

I think they'll be able to ask me questions, obviously, and I'll be able to share my experiences, but I think a lot of it is them just being able to see, like, this is year 13 for me, and I like to get here early, I like to stay late.

Obviously I've got kids and I'm married so my lifestyle is different than a lot of them at 20, but just being able to help give them information in terms of how they should schedule their days, how they should be approaching off-days. Those little things that I think are helpful to establish good patterns and good consistency, and then -- can you repeat the first part of your question.

Q. What do you hope you can take away from this young group?

C.J. McCOLLUM: Yeah, I think the energy, the youthful energy and the appreciation. I always say, I don't ever take the game for granted. I've been here a long time. I've done a lot of these media days, and sometimes it becomes a job. When it's a job, I don't want to play anymore, so I want to continue to have that youthful energy. I want to continue to love it.

I woke up today excited, even though it's my 13th time having media day. Just excited about another opportunity to play the game that I prayed for my whole life.

I just want to continue to approach it the right way and continue to remember, like, once upon a time, I was them. Like I was the youngest on the team, everything was new. I was learning, experiencing new moments and growth moments on the fly, and now I understand, like, Chris

Kaman and Mo Williams, Earl Watson, I played with LA, I played with Wes, Steve Blake. I played with so many guys in their low 30s and I was like, damn, they're old. Now it's me.

It's funny to see through that lens of when I was 21 I got first got league and now I'm 34, like, the differences in the game but also how I think, how I play, how I prepare, how I do everything. Like I have a better appreciation of, like, oh, I get it now.

I think that's just one point of view that I have.

Q. You have a journalism background and write for The Players' Tribune. How important is it going into year 13 to emphasize to these guys to pour into yourself as CJ the person, to be able to then be CJ the player, the dad, the husband? How important is it for you to also make sure that the young guys are understanding that but then also yourself?

C.J. McCOLLUM: Yeah, it's tough. Like I went to school for four years. I went to Lehigh University, obviously, and I was the first player to ever go to the NBA from Lehigh. I was just establishing what am I going to do when I'm not moving no more type of mentality. I want to make sure I have everything set up. I want to do broadcasting. I want to do journalism. I want to do real estate. I just kind of built out things that made me happy. I call them passions and hobbies that are like healthy hobbies, like yoga, stuff like that.

But these are things that I knew would be beneficial to my development as a basketball player, might help me talk to the media better but help me have a better perspective of sports in general.

Then I got the experience to where I could be able to cover the sport when I retire, but for them, especially the young fella from Texas, I was like, what are you going to do besides play basketball? Like I had to envision what it was like when I was 19. I was still in college, not the NBA. He was like, I'll just sleep.

I was like, bro, you've got to find something else. Are you going to play video games? He's like, "no, all I do is hoop."

I was like, that's great and that's important and that's the type of mentality you've got to have, but I was like, you need an escape. I was like, this is about to be 82 games, practice every day, you're only off once every six games. We're going to be in new cities every night. You're going to need something to do on that off-day that's not basketball, like massage, yoga, whatever.

So we were just talking and I was just thinking what did I



do when I was 20? And I was like, damn, I didn't have -- I played video games for like a year and then I stopped playing video games, and then I started doing -- had my own radio show. So that was like an hour out of the day where I could get away from basketball.

But I said, there's 24 hours in the day, so you've got to find some hobbies. I was like, I'll send you some books, I'll send you some stuff, but you've got to find something else that you can escape the game from. If you don't have an escape, you'll go crazy. That's what I noticed in this sport.

Without balance, there's chaos. I think for me, I've tried to continue to figure out ways to have balance in my life.

I ain't perfect, but I think it's just funny, like I tried to envision when I was 20, what was I doing after practice. Now my life is planned out. I've got stuff to do. But when I was 20, I was like, do I want to play 2K, three-hour nap, what am I going to do? Then it's like 5:00, go back in the gym, I guess.

But that's been an interesting -- just conversations of, like, how do you structure your day when you're 20 and you're just by yourself.

Q. It's so hard to win in this league, and this franchise has not won for a very, very long time. They're trying to build it back up to where it needs to be. How difficult is it to be intentional every day in terms of these are the habits that lead to winning, even if we're not winning at the level we want to be winning at right now?

C.J. McCOLLUM: Yeah, it's very difficult. I didn't lose a lot. I haven't lost a lot in my career. So I went to the playoffs nine straight years, I think, almost 10. We lost in New Orleans in the play-in game to OKC a few years ago and that was my first time not making it. But you build winning habits.

This is an extreme example, but how I raise my kids, discipline and saying "please" and "thank you." Even if they don't know how to say it, I'm always instilling it in my daughter, like say "thank you." She's like, "thank you." She can't really talk yet. She's learning.

My son is three, almost four, and he gets it. He says "please" or "thank you." He's like, "Marco, you can't do that." It's instilling in him years and years of doing things the right way, clean up after yourself, we sing the clean-up song, we pray before we eat and we pray before we sleep, even though he didn't know how to do it. It's instilling in him the foundation of this is what's acceptable, this is what's not. Even when he doesn't know any better.

I think the same thing applies to sports. You have a young team, even though they don't know what winning habits look like, they're building habits, right, like they're here today. I was here at 7:45. There was eight guys here. Then at 8:00 there was 15 guys here. Then at 8:30 the G League team is here and everybody on the Wizards team is here. So it's like, it's instilling habits of getting in the building, eating breakfast, get your table work in, get on the court, it's just like a daily vitamin, and each day you take your daily vitamin, you stack those days. You may not get the results right away, it's like a 21-day fitness challenge, you're eating well but you're not losing weight.

You're doing the right things and you're building habits and it's only a matter of time before you have a breakthrough, and I think the same thing applies to this team. They're young, they're talented, but they like basketball, and they live it.

I've been around a long time. I always say it's not the best 450 players, it's the 450 players that fit the best, that do things the right way. It's like 100 of the best talented players and there's like 300 guys that just fit the right roles, and then 50 that are just like this is a great piece and a good person and they're always on time. It's like instilling those habits early on is extremely vital to success.

You may not win right away. It may take you two years. But your 20-year-olds are going to be 25 one day, and you want to make sure those 20-year-old habits are good and they're heading in the right direction so that when they are 25 and they are 26 and your window to win is now, à la OKC, everybody is ready, everybody works hard, everybody knows what they're supposed to do, they understand how to play the game. There's a standard.

Even though you're losing, you can still have a standard of what's acceptable and what's not in terms of how you play. Maybe there's a talent deficiency or maybe you're just young and you lose games at the end because you don't know how to win. But you should be playing hard. You should be working hard and you should be doing things the right way, and you should be held accountable for your actions. Missing shots and making shots is not the end all be all. Were you in the right spot? Did you swing, swing and he just missed it and it is what it is or did you just look him off? Those are habits that you have to build.

If I miss my defensive assignment even though I'm the second oldest on the team, the 20-year-olds should be like, yo C, you're supposed to rotate, I should be like, yeah, you're right. It shouldn't be like a whole back and forth.

So I think those are ways that you build winning habits. I

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try not to say "shut up" in the house because my son is going to be like, "shut up." So you've got to practice what you preach, know what I'm saying? If I'm going to challenge people and hold them accountable, they've got to do the same for me and I invite that, and I think that's what leads to success long-term.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Bub Carrington. Chances are you're going to be sharing a court with him a lot this season in the backcourt. Two-part question, how do you plan on working with him on the court, feeding off of him and vice versa, and what have your initial interpretations of him been?

C.J. McCOLLUM: He's got a good personality. He's from B-more. First of all, he's a Ravens fan and we have the same record as a Ravens, as a Browns fan. So it's a tough year for you guys right now.

But I think he's passionate. He loves the game. He's a competitor. He played all 82 last year, which is hard to do in this league as a rookie. He's taller, and I think he's probably grown since last year, athletic, fast, quick, quick twitch, defensively he's competitive, he competes. Jumper is improving. He's putting the time in to work on the consistency and the release, the balance. He asks questions.

We were talking about routines, what do I do. The other day he was like, damn, go home. It's like, why are you still here? I'm like, one day you're going to be 34 and you're going to be stretching and a 20-year-old is going to walk up to you and you're going to laugh and be like, I remember when I was that guy. I was like, you've got to take care of yourself before you have an issue. You played 82 last year. I'm taking care of myself before my calves or my Achilles or my foot or my shoulder -- I'm taking care of it in advance. I don't have to be injured to get treatment. I'm just making sure I'm proactive.

But he asks the right questions. He works. I think he wants to be good, and that's the important part.

Everybody has the tools and the resources, but who actually really wants it. Like we've all got to -- there's 30 teams and 30 staffs. We've all got 24 hours scan in and scan out access, but it comes down to who really wants it. How determined are you to be successful and what are you willing to sacrifice in order to accomplish that.

I think he has the right mentality and approach to the game.

Q. CJ, when you walked in, I'm having a flashback of me calling your 50 points you gave the Wizards last

year. I'm kind of curious where you are. You talked about March you kind of had to shut it down. But what have you done since March until now to get yourself ready for another season?

C.J. McCOLLUM: Yeah, I've had 13 summers to figure out exactly what I need to get ready for a season. Obviously there's been different situations. I've been utilized differently. Probably nine out of those 13 years.

I did exactly what I needed to do to be ready to play as many minutes as I needed to play and any role that I need to play. From a conditioning standpoint, I started conditioning earlier, started on the track earlier, lateral movement stuff, obviously the shooting, the handles, that is what it is. Respectfully, it's just really how it's supposed to be.

But I think looking at my game and how my game has aged alongside the NBA, like I can shoot threes, I've got a midrange, I've got a floater, I can run a pick-and-roll and I can score in iso. It's just about lateral movement. Guys are getting faster. They're more athletic. So how you move laterally, can you guard pick-and-rolls, can you help?

And then like we're going to play fast because we're really young, so being able to run the floor, being able to pass ahead, being able to talk.

I think a lot of that is conditioning, talking when you're tired. You ever run and be talking, like jogging? So being in better shape, being able to sleep more. I got my PT, my guy, my specialist is here, just landed. So I've got everything I need to be successful. Now it's just about showing up and just clock in and I did what I was supposed to do.

So I'm excited about the year. I think this will be my best year yet. I said that last year, and it was a pretty good year. I was just very injured, so it was difficult to win games.

But physically I feel great. I'm in better shape now than when I had 50 against you guys last year (laughing), which is funny. It's funny to think about.

Q. It's one thing to be one of 450 when you first get into this league, but how do you remain one of 450 as long as you have and actually teach these players what it takes to get a second contract, a third contract?

C.J. McCOLLUM: Yeah, I said the same thing to my guys, Herb, Trey, José, and they watch. I said, look, man, I don't have the answers to everything, but I know how to make



money. I was like, I know how to stay in the league. I know how to do things the right way. I know how to be valuable. I know how to show up on time. I know how to take coaching. I don't get in trouble off the court. I know how to invest. I said, I know how to do a lot of things right and I know what not to do because I've seen it.

So I'm like, if you just watch, ask questions and learn, I don't have all the answers, man, but I can help you make a little bit more money if you just pay attention, and they listen and ask questions.

Herb cashed out, he signed another day, Trey, 100 million, José is going to get paid again. They ask questions, they listen.

I think for me, it's about we have all these examples of what success looks like. It's like, follow the examples, don't be afraid to ask the right questions. Before I invested in real estate, I called Junior Bridgeman and I asked him about investing, asked him about franchising. I asked Don Peebles about real estate. I don't have any ego when it comes to information.

I asked Eric Snow, how did you stay in the league? Keith McLeod, how did you stay in the league? Gary Grant. What do you wish you could have done better?

I called Steph, I called him, how do you shoot to good? I don't have an ego. Whenever it comes to improving my game -- I used to guard Wesley Matthews in the post and I needed to guard better in the post, and he guarded me in the perimeter. I used to guard Melo in the post and it was like, all right. I've got to get better at guarding the post.

I like to ask questions, and I think for young players, if you want to be in the league, like, just look around, see who's hanging around, see who continues to get contract after contract. See who's getting 20 million, see who's getting 10, see who's getting 5 when they shouldn't be getting 5 and go talk to them. Like this is year 16, and you get signed early. Like that's important. This is money that you're going to need when you're 50.

It's reversed for us, like earning potential max right now. You're talking 20 to 35, which is not how it is in the real world, and you've got to maximize your earning potential. For me, I maximized my blessings. I went to Lehigh. I graduated. I got a degree. I worked for ESPN. I've done all these things and I still play at a high level, and I'm playing at a high level again this year.

The blessing is that I'll be able to stop playing when I want to stop playing. I won't get forced out. It'll be like, all right, this was fun, I'm moving on, as opposed to guys that get

forced out for not doing things the right way.

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