

# Washington Wizards Media Conference

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## Coach Brian Keefe Media Conference



Wizards 119, Nets 99

**Q. Is this as confident as your team has looked since you became the coach here?**

BRIAN KEEFE: Good question. I probably haven't overly thought about that, to be honest. Just thought we played a good complete game. They made some runs, and I think that's what we talked about before the game is teams are going to do that, and I thought we answered those runs well, and we answered with our defense that led to easy baskets in transition. I thought Bilal for not like a great shooting night, his impact on the game, which is really important to me, he was all over the place with his defensive effort, and I thought it was very contagious for our group tonight.

**Q. Second fewest points allowed all season. What do you think catalyzed that?**

BRIAN KEEFE: I think our ball pressure was good. We forced turnovers. This is a good three-point shooting team. They probably missed some shots that they normally hit, but I thought we contested them really well. When we were in our half court, our defense was pretty good tonight. A couple of turnovers led to some easy transition in the second half, but our half-court defense was really good.

**Q. With Justin Champagnie, we talk a lot about the stuff that he does off the ball, like the offensive rebounding and the defense and what have you, but he can also score. He had 20 points off the bench tonight. Can you speak to his game and what it means when he gets going to open up the entire rest of the team on offense?**

BRIAN KEEFE: He scores in a variety of ways. We know the offensive rebound. He's a great cutter. Then he's a good three-point shooter, and that was going to come around. He shot really well from three last year, and that's what's on the uptick here lately. But he does all the little intangible stuff, transition, cutting, offensive rebounds, and

those lead to easy baskets for him. Really good.

**Q. You talked about it in the pregame; you had another stretch tonight where you guys for a stretch of time in the fourth specifically, two plus minutes, shots just weren't falling. They also went on an extended run for three plus minutes, but the guys, specifically on the defensive end, stayed with it. What did you see from them on the defensive end that you could tell that eventually the shots would fall and you weren't really worried about it?**

BRIAN KEEFE: I think that's what we're learning is that the consistency of defense is what's going to carry the day for our team. Teams are going to go on runs. Teams are going to make shots. But can you buckle down and get stops on almost -- I wouldn't say command, but can you really focus in and get the stops when you need them.

Our group is learning and growing how to do that. We still have a long ways to go. This is early in the process for us. But we're learning how the importance of that and really to focus in in key possessions to do that, and that always triggers our offense.

**Q. Alex, what he's been able to do defensively -- I know we ask you about it all the time, and I have to look at my notes to get it exactly right. Tonight was a five-block game, but it was also 24 blocks in the last six games he's had. He also has the longest active streak with six games two plus blocks. What is it about his defense that something continues to shift for him in how he's reading and seeing the game that allows him to put himself in the right position to have an impact protecting the rim?**

BRIAN KEEFE: It's the number one thing for him, for our team, for our organization. It's why he's here. He's here to protect the rim, and he's growing with that. Last year he was a great shot blocker. Now he's learning when to do it in different times in the game. He can read things better. He understands our schemes, our coverages.

But he's the anchor. We need him to do that, and he's

getting better, and I think he still has room to grow, which sounds crazy with that many blocks in that many games, but I think he can be a special defender.

**Q. Coach, this is the kind of game where pretty much everybody had a nice showing. How do you react as a coaching staff with a team so full of young players trying to develop when almost everyone has a good night?**

BRIAN KEEFE: I think that's been happening a lot lately. I think we talked about that pregame. Everybody is contributing to these games. Again, AJ stepped up, Will Riley had a good game. We obviously saw J.C. in there. But everybody is contributing. Marvin we don't talk about a lot; he's contributing big time, too.

Everybody is leaving an imprint on the game. That's what we want to do. But they're doing it together, and that's how we want to grow our team. It's a team sport, and you can see the synergy is growing, but like I said, this is early in our process. We want to keep getting better. Those are things we're going to keep working on day-to-day.

**Q. With Coulibaly, he's been obviously in and out historically, but he's had a nice stretch of games here back healthy. Is this kind of what you envision him as just in general, a good two-way guy? For today's performance, for example, is that what you envision is an ideal game for him?**

BRIAN KEEFE: He's one of those guys he's just continuing to grow. I talked about the imprint he's had on the game. That's been a lot of times lately, is that he can have such an imprint on this, starting with the defensive end, his ability to make plays on that end. You saw some of the hustle plays. He had one late in the game where he dove on the floor and tipped it. Those are just winning plays that impact the team, and that stuff is contagious, and he's been setting the tone for sure for us.

**Q. You guys are still top 10 in the league in pace this season, but over your last nine games, you guys were like 21st. Did you make the conscious decision to slow everyone down, and how has that helped the offense and the defense function?**

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, I think you asked me this question the other day. Pace is measured by the amount of possessions. We look at different ways of pace and what's important, how fast you're getting into your offense, half-court pace, you're cutting, you're moving. Where we fall in the rankings of the league, that stuff matters to a degree, but we have more of our internal stuff, and we're just playing to how we want to play, and that starts with the

defense.

**Q. You've been deploying the all-bench lineups pretty quickly in the first quarter compared to how some other coaches would do. How has this group given you as a coach the confidence to turn to that earlier?**

BRIAN KEEFE: I have all the confidence in all of my guys on the roster. I get to see it. I get to see the work and what they're doing behind the scenes every day, how they're preparing. I trust every guy when their opportunity arises, but I've had trust with that second unit. They come in, and they've really changed the game for us in a lot of these games recently. We saw it in the Milwaukee game. We saw it tonight. They've been putting their imprint when they're in the game, and that's what we want all of our guys to do.

**Q. Coach, earlier you mentioned Bilal didn't have a great shooting night. However, he did get to the free-throw line eight times, had half of the team's free throws tonight. Has that been an emphasis? Feels like he's drawing more fouls lately and shooting more free throws?**

BRIAN KEEFE: We want him to be -- he's one of our guys that can attack the paint. He can do that in transition. He can do that in the half court. We want him to put pressure, and free throws gets us set in our defense, so we want him to be aggressive, and he's been really aggressive lately. We like that.

**Q. I think we've already hammered the nail on the head that the team is doing well all together. Holding the Nets to under 100 points, that's a feat in the modern NBA, everything considered. How much do you think player development has to do with this, and how do you think that this positive streak can be maintained for the rest of the season?**

BRIAN KEEFE: As you guys know, what we feel as an organization about player development is the most important thing to us. We take a lot of pride in that.

We want our players to improve, and how do you do that? It's really a coordinated effort with our whole organization. It's something we take very seriously, and our guys are improving.

But we have a long way to go. We're not skipping steps here. We're still building habits on our team and on our roster. We're just going to focus on what we can control, and that's getting back into the gym when we have our next practice, our next shootaround, and that's how we get better at things. That's part of player development is how



do you get yourself ready to play, how do you prepare, how do you train. We're teaching and learning that, our guys that right now. We've had great examples on our roster with some of our veteran players.

But that's a big deal to us. That's something we take very seriously.

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