

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Coach Brian Keefe

Media Conference



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Q. Coach, what went behind the personnel decision to close out the game with guys like Skal, Sharife and Will out there?

BRIAN KEEFE: First of all, I said this my very first conversation at the start of the year, at training camp. This is the year we're going to be evaluating opportunities for guys. We've played a heavy schedule here lately. We're in a dense part. I think we've played almost seven of the last ten. We've got a couple more back to back coming on the back end of this week, too. We're just coming off back to back. I thought this was an opportunity to get our guys to play in also crunch-time minutes, and they did terrific. It was really good.

It also shows you the synergy that we have between the Go-Go and the Wizards. A lot of these guys are playing with Cody and their staff. They're running the same exact things. So I'm calling some of our end-of-game plays, and they know them. You can see in the game that there's confidence in what we're doing because of the work and the connection between the two teams.

I was really pleased with the effort tonight. I was really impressed with how we finished out the game with execution on both ends of the floor.

Q. Will Riley to Meghan postgame said that the chemistry they've built with a bunch of those guys on the Go-Go helped tonight. How do you think that manifested itself, especially late?

BRIAN KEEFE: When you saw the pick-and-rolls of him and Skal, him and Sharife, AJ, I thought those guys were terrific. Anthony Gill's defense down the stretch. I was really pleased with how we executed. I was really pleased.

Q. Sacramento made that run, especially late in the game. In any other situation, I know you mentioned the schedule and you wanted to look at guys. Some

coaches might have gone back to their starting unit. What does it say about the work these guys have put in, that not only you want to look at them but you had the faith in them to figure this out in real time?

BRIAN KEEFE: You know, those guys played really well in the first half, also. I think we can't forget about how well they played in the first half. They were the ones who kind of built that lead up, and I wanted to see them under pressure. That's a good way for us to learn and them to grow.

We talked about that opportunity. We need the opportunity to see them in those situations so they can improve. You're not going to get that all the time. I thought those guys really grew a lot tonight.

Q. I know with running similar sets between you and Cody is one thing, but also the level of talent between the NBA and the G-League, depending on who you're matching up against, can also be different. But these guys seem to be able to rise to the occasion even with two longtime vets in Levine and DeRozan trying to throw everything at them. What did you see from them, especially defensively, that they were managing what was going on, figuring out solutions, coverages in tight situations, but just navigating a team trying to get another win, as well?

BRIAN KEEFE: I thought I saw a lot of -- Anthony Gill, you've got to give him a lot of credit for being the veteran presence out there defensively. DeRozan and Levine had it going. But we got stops down the stretch. It started with Anthony, his ball pressure, pushing him off his spots, making him take tough contest. But then those other guys, right spots, doing the right thing, in the right shell spots, contesting, and then finishing with rebounding. Very well done.

Q. I've covered the Go-Go for the last couple years and seen Cody Toppert's growth as a coach. Last night at the game he said the theme was empty the tank and give everything they had. They won last night. I know you mentioned that there's synergy. Is



that kind of some of the themes that you've been taking, going back and forth with him, as well, and you've been giving them the same thing?

BRIAN KEEFE: For sure. Cody is out there with us tonight. Cody is just another member of our staff. That's how I look at him. And then obviously his coaching with the Go-Go and running their practice, running their games. I am constantly talking to him. He does a great job. He's a great coach. We're really lucky to have him.

That connection, like we just talked about, is really important, terminology, schemes, offensive sets, then obviously we're picking each other's brains just like I do with the rest of my staff on how do we best help our team grow. Communication with the guys aside, they're working on the same things. Both staffs are connected. Their whole staff was there tonight with us. The whole Go-Go staff is here with us at his themes.

That stuff really carries a lot when they're in these pressure situations. They've actually done them because some of these guys are playing big minutes in these games, so Skal has played some of those minutes. Sharife played in the game last night and did that, Will Riley, Jamir. Those things are huge for us. We're also in the same building, so really intentional about how we go about that. But Cody has been a terrific partner with us for sure.

Q. With some of the G-League guys that you have like Jamir, Sharife and Will, how much growth have you seen in them even from their first couple times getting minutes with you guys in comparison to now, if you could elaborate?

BRIAN KEEFE: Jamir and Will Riley have been in the rotation here for a long stretch. You see what they bring to the game, Jamir with his defensive presence, his poise on the offensive end. Will is growing defensively. You see his play-making, his shot-making ability. Those guys are growing. They're going through the fire. We wanted to see them in a situation where the real pressure was on at the end, and those guys came through.

Q. Aside from seeing the game slow down and getting minutes, where has Will Riley made improvements this season?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, I think, first of all, defensively he's gotten better and better, cutting people off, using his length. He's a tall guy. He's like 6'8", almost 6'9", learning that he can contest shots really well. The offensive stuff is just learning our system and how the NBA plays.

I thought he did a terrific job tonight at making quick

decisions, making reads. He's got a really unique game. Just has a really fast processing ability. You're seeing that out there tonight.

He can see spaces and angles, and obviously you see his footwork and his pivoting. He's just getting more comfortable with all these things.

Q. What was your rationale for not playing Justin Champagnie tonight?

BRIAN KEEFE: Justin has been playing a lot of minutes for us. Just wanted to give some other guys some shots, some looks. He'll be back in here very soon.

Q. The starters and the regular rotation guys were clearly rooting for everyone who was playing in the fourth quarter. Having said that, are you worried you'll lose any credibility in your locker room not playing the starters who have also earned their minutes down the stretch of some games?

BRIAN KEEFE: No, no worries at all. Those guys are the ultimate teammates and we have a great locker room, so I never would have one thought or concern of that.

Q. Can you go into how Khris has helped this team in particular since the big trade with CJ and Corey gone?

BRIAN KEEFE: You can just go back to last year. I can just talk about the totality of what Khris has done. I think I said it pregame; someone asked me about him. But his professionalism, how he works, how he trains, how he prepares, how he connects the team on the court, how he holds us to a high standard in everybody because of how he plays, those things can never be measured how important they are. It's a big deal.

Like I said, I think I said earlier, we're really grateful he's here with us.

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