

WNBA Media Conference

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Commissioner Cathy

Engelbert

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to our media for joining us. Once again, we will begin with opening remarks by Commissioner Cathy Engelbert and then we will open up to question and answer.

Following today's call we will have a transcript available on WNBA Media Central. With that, I'll turn it over to Cathy.

CATHY ENGELBERT: Thank you, Ron, and thank you everyone for joining this call today. In reflecting on the year that we had our first virtual draft, the first in professional sports, I just really want to thank you all for your ongoing coverage of the WNBA.

I know you were all probably watching the NCAA Women's Tournament as much as I was this year, and so much excitement around this incoming draft class, their level of play, their overall talent. I was just so pleased to see it on full display over the past few weeks.

We certainly look forward to welcoming many of them into the WNBA.

This season, as you're already aware, we just issued our schedule, and the 25th season for the W, and this milestone couldn't have come at a more pivotal moment. I think since I've been at the league, it seems like the momentum for women's sports has only continued to grow, and coming off a tremendous season last year, we're well poised for success and growth, and I couldn't be more pleased with how things are going.

Earlier today, as I just mentioned, we announced we're tipping off on May 14. We'll be announcing our TV schedule in the coming weeks. Very excited about that. And much like last season, we're still navigating through the coronavirus pandemic. We're still seeing injustices. We've seen what's been happening in Minneapolis, the shooting in the suburb over the weekend. We've seen the trial going on. We've seen the Asian American and Pacific Islanders hate crimes.



All of that is still going on, so we're still monitoring and helping our players and our staff deal with that.

I want to say that I can't be more proud of the WNBA and the WNBPA Social Justice Council which was, as I said last year, not a one-and-done, and they have continued to lead important work in the community.

This year I think what you'll be seeing is the players are going to be focused on health equity given that we're still in the pandemic, and civic engagement and voting rights. Especially impacting communities of color on both of those topics.

We'll have more to share regarding our social justice efforts as the season gets underway.

And similar to last season, I was hoping we wouldn't have to be working through all the protocols because of COVID, but we've been working with public health officials, medical experts, a little bit of déjà-vu, although obviously a lot more about the virus and the vaccine that's providing hope.

We're working with the Players Association, as well, and teams to create a plan to safely conduct our season amid this pandemic.

We're excited about the ability to return to our home markets, so we'll be in our 12 arenas. But we know we need to stay vigilant to minimize risk as much as possible, so we're working on a different set of protocols than we had when we were in the bubble.

You'll be hearing more about that.

As we head into the season, we launched our "Count It" campaign, which has gone really well. We unveiled the new Nike uniforms last week. Hope you all saw that. The new Wilson game ball, and more.

I just want to thank everyone who helped make it possible. One of the things we did that you may have read about is that we formed a WNBA Advisory Board, and that was to get some of the pioneers of our league who were around 25 years ago and since then to help us continue to think through how to build the momentum.

I always want to shout out also some of our outstanding



partners who I've said, if we don't have them, we don't get all this done. Our marquee partner AT&T, our inaugural WNBA Changemakers, AT&T, Deloitte, and Nike.

Our Draft partners, our presenting partner State Farm; associate partners Beats, SAP, Microsoft, and New Era. In fact, I still had some of the signs in the room I'm in right now where I did the Draft from from our presenting partners and associate partners from last year.

So really appreciate their support.

I never can forget about our team owners, their ongoing support, both monetarily as well as their support of our players and our teams. We have new team owners this year with Mark Davis at the Las Vegas Aces, and Renee Montgomery, Larry Gottesdiener and Suzanne Abair of the Atlanta Dream. So we're really grateful for their interest and development in our league.

And, of course, players, coaches, staff, who once again will participate in a season unlike any other. We're obviously having calls again to answer lots of questions related to the start-up of the season.

And speaking of the players, we all saw yet another offseason of player movement from Candace Parker to Chicago to Natasha Howard to the Liberty, Chelsea Gray joining the Aces. Going to see a fair amount of new faces with new teams, and I think with the upcoming draft picks, we're hoping for lots of great storylines. I know you all help us tell those stories.

Again, the 25th season is upon us, Draft Thursday night, and then tip about a month later.

But thanks again for your support and coverage, and I am happy to take any questions.

Q. I have two questions for you. The first one is are we expecting fans in attendance when the season opens on the May 14?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Okay, so first question on fans, yes. So I think it's right now nine of our 12 markets, but we're negotiating on the 10th because you have to negotiate locally as well as with the local health officials.

I think in nine of our 12 markets we'll have the ability to have fans. It'll be reduced, and we're hoping as we go into the Olympic break and come off of that maybe we can have more full arenas.

But yes, we're going to start with about three quarters with fans.

Q. Can you say anything about the testing protocols? I think camps open up on May 25, so I'm guessing they need to start getting there sooner for testing purposes.

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yes, very good. You've learned from the Bubble last year that there will be a testing protocol before they get into the market and then leading up to group activities, so they'll be able to do individual workouts during kind of an initial quarantine period and then we'll start group activities on or about the 25th.

If all goes well, of course.

So yes, there will be a whole regimen, and it will be different whether you're vaccinated or not vaccinated. If you're fully vaccinated we'll have a shorter quarantine based on the guidance we've gotten from our experts and the CDC, and unvaccinated players will have to comply with the longer protocol.

But we'll ask all of our players to get into market so we can start group activities for all on the 25th.

Q. I thought it was a pretty powerful piece that you wrote on WNBA.com a couple days ago, and I just wanted to ask you if -- you said this thing about now after two years you've seen clearly the disparities between men's and women's sports and dealing with the media. Are you surprised after spending time at a corporation which seems to value women that the sporting world seems to lag so far behind?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, excellent question, and for those that don't know, I wrote an opinion piece on, yeah, it is kind of my observations now after like 20 months in the role, and given that there was a lot of discussion around the NCAA situation between the men's and women's tournaments.

But that's why I wanted to grab the narrative away from that and just give some of my insights and observations being in this role now and being in sports. Coming from big business, a lot of similarities, but there are some differences.

I'd say some of the things did not surprise me. Other things do. Like the media rights fee gap definitely surprised me, which is why I focused in the opinion piece on that, because that doesn't make sense to me, and the only thing that could make sense is that the valuation model underlying the way those media rights fees are calculated between the women's sports and men's sports must be flawed, right?

Because even in some cases where we have quantitative data that certainly support -- would hold up a media rights fee versus some of the men's professional leagues, we're not getting that in the marketplace.

That was a bit of an observation from my 19, 20 months in this role, and then just really a little call to action as to what the real issue is here and make sure that people are focused on the real issue. Here are the statistics that I stated in that piece, and particularly around the media rights fee gap.

Q. The WNBA Draft seems to be a reminder every year how much talent there is out there and how few of these players make the league with the number of roster spots. Has there been any discussion about WNBA expansion and what would it take for that to happen in the near future?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, so it's an important question, and I think we'd probably have a much more developed answer if it hasn't been for the pandemic and not having fans last year and limited fans this year, with an Olympic postponement into this year.

So lots of moving parts obviously to make sure we have a successful season this year. But as I've mentioned, expansion is certainly on the list of things I've been thinking about down the road.

It is interesting to note how competitive and how deep the talent in this league is, and so it's certainly something that as we come out of this pandemic, hopefully next year, that we're prepared to start talking about.

But right now we're still focused on the transformation I talked about last year. We had a little bit of pause in some of those activities because of the pandemic and trying to get the Bubble done last year, but I think if we have a very successful season this year, this time next year we can certainly start talking about what expansion would look like, how many, and the time frame over which that would occur.

Q. Kind of going down the same vein, I know this has been a big topic since the NCAA Tournament; a lot of talk about expansion and early entry. I'm curious, I know how everything is set up now, but I'm curious what your overall thoughts are looking down the road and what your feelings are about early entry having a bigger place in how the league and how the CBA are constructed.

CATHY ENGELBERT: First, I think it's great to be having this conversation, and it really speaks to the evolution of

the women's game. It's a great signal for the league that people are really talking about freshmen in the women's game and how they should become professional sooner. I think it's great.

It hasn't been something, and I think Sue Bird said this in a recent issue that maybe wasn't at the forefront of our discussions with the Players Association when we were doing the last CBA, but as with all topics, we're running a player-first league and we're open and willing to discuss the current rule that's in place.

But again, it's something that if that's what the players want us to look at, we're certainly willing to look at it, but currently our rule that we negotiated on the current CBA would not have freshmen coming right out of the U.S. college and university system into the Draft.

But certainly something as we evolve and as the conversation evolves that I just think it's great to even be having the conversation.

Q. Now that we've reached 25 years, have we reached a point where you're not talking about can the league survive and will it ever get further than this? And the second question is that we only have one black female coach in the league, and we're talking about a league that has a majority of black players. Are we ever going to move forward in that aspect?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, thank you so much for your question. You know, certainly let me address the last question first. You know, this is something that I am totally focused on is diversity in hiring practices.

It's making sure that we're helping build that pipeline of individuals who then would be in the running for these head coaching positions or ownership positions, like with Renee Montgomery.

So I think we're making progress. I know it may not view outside in as enough, but I think we're building a really outstanding pipeline. And that's another reason why we wanted to reengage with our legends of the league, because those players that played, whether it's 25 years ago or 15 years ago or 10 years ago, and now that we have former WNBA players in the front office or coaching in the W.

We have Rebekkah Brunson and Tamika Catchings; Bethany Donaphin, who works on my team is a former player for the Liberty and Stanford grad, Vickie Johnson as you mentioned, and [Plenette] Pearson and [Noelle] Quinn and [Tanisha] Wright and [Chasity] Melvin. I mean, we've got a long list of players, and it's great to see former WNBA

players like Dawn Staley and Adia Barnes making history in coaching for their respective teams in the Final Four.

I think it is about building a pipeline and making sure that when the next head coaching jobs become -- when there's a vacancy or in the front office, I definitely think we have to do better across the board, but I think we are making progress.

And now that I went on and on, your first question was?

Q. Have we gotten past the point of saying will this league survive?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Oh, yeah. I would say, again, absent the pandemic where we were trying to get from survive to thrive, that we've made a ton of progress.

I think, again, as I said, the momentum around women's sports and specifically the WNBA in leading that movement has really pleased me as to the progress we're making.

But we can't let up, so I do think we're in a thrive mode now, but we still need to have a fair amount of transformation at our team level, at the league level, and our digital level and merch and everything.

But we're off to such a great start this year with the uniform unveiled and the new ball, Wilson ball and the Nike uniform. I think there's a lot to come and there's still a lot of transformation to be done, but I'd say we're in the thrive mode now.

Q. To jump off of the question about expansion, just wondering within the context of some things you touched on in your opening statement about the fact that there's a clear energy behind women's sports in general. We're obviously seeing a number of high-profile investors and NWSL, as well. I'm wondering less about whether expansion is something you'd like to see and more like have the frequency and quality of your conversations with potential new investors changed, and has that affected your thinking about how quickly and how much the league can expand?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, it's a great question. I think the conversations have definitely changed for the positive. Conversations we might have been having a year ago before we even hit the pandemic around where people were willing to invest in the league, whether it's a corporation, whether it's a media deal or whether it's a new owner of one of our teams, those are definitely all moving in a positive direction.

The narrative we have coming off the 2020 season and the success not only on the court but off the court has really resonated with companies who are trying to support diverse work forces and to develop those and to develop the next generation of readers and there's no demographic like our demographic that will help companies on that journey, and I think we're working really hard activating with our current partners and bringing in new partners around exactly how to do that and how to provide that platform to companies to come in and invest in us and get a return for their investment that is maybe not always captured by impressions and traditional quantitative metrics, but certainly in the diversity, equity and equality space, inclusion space, the LGBTQ+ space, the younger digital native space where we see a younger fan than other leagues.

So those are all the things that are attracting companies to us and investors to us, and it's definitely an easier conversation today than it was even a year ago as I had seen women's sports and the momentum evolve.

But we still have to keep working on what I mentioned in my opinion piece. The valuation model is broken. We had great conversations and it comes down to dollars sometimes at least in my humble opinion I'll call it, and now 20 months in I still believe our assets are undervalued, our narrative is undervalued, and I think it's just because the spreadsheets and the models and the algorithms are set up for a time in the past that hasn't evolved with the diversity, equity, and inclusion of the future.

Again, I have the corporate experience of seeing that evolve and seeing investment even though you couldn't find the dollars to look at the return on that investment, but everybody knew it was the right thing to do because they were investing in a diverse workforce because the demographics were such that you were going to be outside looking in on the work or talent if you didn't invest in diverse talent.

My goal with this call to action is to have people support these elite athletes so that we can get them to be the next generation of leaders or, to the question earlier, the next head coach or the next GM or the next front office or the next community leader or elected leader.

That's kind of all part of the way I see this evolving.

Q. I was wondering, seeing a lot of those WNBA players work with sort of vaccination awareness, is there a goal to have all players and team personnel vaccinated by the time the season starts? And could you also maybe talk about what you have learned and observed from the NBA and maybe the NHL, other

leagues, that have had their seasons outside of a bubble and how you can kind of take some of the things that they've done and implement them in the WNBA?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, thanks. So first on vaccines, so yes, it always starts with vaccine education, vaccine awareness, and then certainly there will be players who have already been vaccinated who are now speaking out about that, doing public service work around that.

So I think of course this is a personal health decision for each player and staff member, and it isn't just the players. If you think about it, the staff members, the head coaches, the GMs, everyone who will be around the players, the arena workers, the household individuals, we're certainly working to make sure that everybody gets the education they need, can make the health decision as to whether to get vaccinated.

Of course we think the vaccine offers a lot of hope for the future of the protocols and the loosening of the protocols, and so we do have different protocols if you're fully vaccinated versus not. And as I mentioned earlier, one of the most obvious ones is what the CDC has already come out with, with quarantining if you have a close contact with someone who's tested positive. If you're fully vaccinated you won't need to quarantine; if you're not, you will, and that would take you out of play if you're a player or out of coaching if you're a coach or anybody in the ecosystem.

So yeah, we highly recommend and understand it's a decision by each player and each staff member, but we are working to help teams provide opportunities now that the eligibility has opened up in almost -- certainly every state that our teams play in, and as we get to training camp we'd love to continue to facilitate players wanting to get the vaccine, and that's what we're working on with teams right now.

Your second question, yes, I've been fortunate to have a front row seat for what's been happening in the NBA since December. I've observed in December they only had six arenas with fans and now they have 21 I think of the 30.

So just looking at the fan protocols, how that's working, how fans are willing to come back in arenas, tested, untested, where they sit, all of that.

Not as close to everything the NHL is doing. I know they just had a big shutdown of the Vancouver Canucks.

But certainly learning and observing all of the protocols and just the evolution of it, too, because everything started out one way in December and it might have changed in

January and February.

Just monitoring, again -- I hate to say it because I said it a lot last year -- the trajectory of the virus, the rollout of the vaccines, and determining what the best format is in our 12 arenas, which obviously are not necessarily the same as an NHL or NBA arena, and trying to have the best protocols to keep our players and staff safe, including, again, household members as well as arena workers.

Q. Going back to the Draft a little bit and looking at the number of players, the sheer number of players who probably won't even make it to opening night or some won't make it to training camp, and looking at next year when you're going to have players come and want to be in the Draft, have there been any discussions of any way to keep these young athletes in the pipeline somehow and not lose them and maybe do something along the lines of what the NBA has done to keep these players motivated to want to play and stay engaged with the league?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, it's a great question because we do know we'll have bumps along the road like the NHL and NBA and others have had who have gone back into their arenas, and certainly we'll have a set of protocols for players being called up.

You know, there's also a longer term thought as to whether you would have a pipeline of players who don't make a WNBA team because of the depth and breadth of our league right now. And 3X3 will be an Olympic sport this year. Is that opportunity for players at the next level below the WNBA players to stay and to train around that format of the game?

I don't know. But yeah, there are some longer-term things that we need to think through to make sure that we're providing -- there's five million youth girls playing basketball in the United States today, and obviously only a very small subset of those will make it professionally, just like on the men's side, as well.

I do think we need to do some more longer term thinking about development, about what we're doing already in Jr. WNBA and Her Time to Play.

So we do have a lot of programs for youth as they get into the collegiate levels and to the professional levels.

But again, expansion might help that down the road some day when we start adding teams, but for now I think we're definitely going to have protocols for call-up should there be injuries or COVID issues in the league this year.

Q. As you know, Rick Welts retired last week from the NBA, and I've noticed in his career retrospective that the WNBA is not mentioned at all, and he won an award along with Val Ackerman for helping market the league in its early years. I wanted to know if you have plans to include him in the 25th anniversary celebration?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, thanks for the question. It's a great question. Rick was part of launching the league with David Stern coming off the '96 Olympics. I think he also has a huge passion for the league. He is actually on our Advisory Council, so Rick is one of the people that we're already getting that perspective from around what we're doing, not just in the 25th season but beyond.

So absolutely Rick -- I've talked to Rick several times. Right before the pandemic I was out at a Warriors game and trying to get to know Rick a little bit because I knew he was such a historian about the league as well as an advocate for the league.

So yes, Rick is already engaged with the league and is in our Advisory Council.

Q. There's been a lot of talk for the last few weeks going on with Draymond Green and with the WNBA players as far as how he felt and some players, whether they agreed or wanted to enlighten him on what's going on. Do you believe that just to have that national talk, that talk on social media and now with everybody, do you feel like that could be beneficial for the league as far as a company making an investment?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, good question. So, certainly having that national dialogue around the disparities is, again, one of the other reasons why I issued the opinion piece, to kind of put them in context, again, from my experience so far in the league.

You know, I think having that dialogue -- and we're always happy for NBA players and other professional athletes to weigh in on their observations, and we've had other NBA players weigh in, as well. We've had advocates of the league from the NBA.

So I do think having the dialogue is healthy. It's a healthy part of what players do on social media, right? I've had to get used to that a little bit coming in from the business world where that didn't happen as much.

But yeah, I think that dialogue is healthy. I think we've got to look at all the different perspectives and the way people see us outside in, inside out, and determine what the best way is to market our players, to grow the league, to look at

how we bring investors into the league, how we look at teams and their operations, how we transform our digital platform.

So we're always open for all feedback. And yes, having a national dialogue around that is always welcome around the WNBA.

Q. I was just curious going back to the Draft stuff, is there anything that you learned from last year that you plan to bring in for this year? Is there anything that's going to differ as far as the virtual draft running, any kinks that you guys worked out from last year?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Great question. Because I'm doing this call from the Draft room in my house, so the one thing we're not going to do is do it from my house this year.

So I will be at an ESPN studio, and so my kids won't have to be handing me the jerseys that I was ironing the night before and all the stuff we had to do.

So we'll have a much more organized, professional -- and I think ESPN did an amazing job last year because you didn't see all that behind the scenes stuff in my house, but I'll be happy to be in the studio with lots of support this year. That's the good news.

But, you know, certainly the moment that we call the draftees' names, would I love them to be there, to come up to the podium? Yes. But given the long NCAA season, the protocols, the last thing we wanted to put these players through were more protocols to come to a live draft.

I think we learned some things about how to interact with them. We learned some things about making sure that technology holds up and works, and so I think it'll be another great production by ESPN. They've been such a great partner since the beginning of this league 25 years ago.

Really looking forward to it, and there will be some special elements in the Draft, including having Tina Thompson involved, a legend.

I think last year we didn't have much opportunity to do that, but we had the death of David Stern and Kobe Bryant and those three young girls, we had some special moments. This year we will have some special moments that are just different.

Hopefully the players also being engaged and involved in all the stuff we do around it and we're going to do a virtual orange carpet and things like that. So some exciting elements to look forward to.

Q. With the way the world is going currently, and I know last year with being in the Bubble in Bradenton, teams took a stand with regard to social injustices. Are you prepared to do that again this year, and what will be done should a unfortunate incident occur?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yes, and very good question, because we just saw the results of that over the weekend. I think I mentioned the Social Justice Council now that's in place that was just kind of new last year, but now I think the players really look to them, and we've been meeting over the course of the offseason, as well.

I think we're in a better position to make sure our players feel that they're continuing with their strong voice, with their strong platform, and again, their focus this year, for instance, on health equity, on civic engagement and voting rights. Just so proud that they just continue to find the right issues at the right time to advocate for.

But there's complex issues out there in this world and there's a lot of divisiveness still out there. So as events unfold we've got to stay close to the players. We built trust with them last season with the support and the amplification of their strong social justice platforms.

Ultimately the players want to be about change and they want to have their hand in that change, and I think whether it's civic engagement and voting rights or health equity and other issues that women are passionate about, I really look forward to seeing what they do this year and handling any crises that come our way, which, again, I think if you looked at what the players accomplished last year when faced with multiple crises at one time, I'm hoping they get a little break because this is a heavy burden on the players to carry their messaging and their powerful statements that they've had about being women and women professional athletes and being even beyond the sports landscape.

Again, we'll obviously stay close to them about how they're thinking, how they're feeling, how they're impacted by country and world events and work through those with them.

I think the good news is we built a lot of trust with them last year, and hopefully we'll make sure that we can continue to commit with them on driving this meaningful change that they're looking for in their communities.

Q. I was hoping you could speak to the Minnesota Lynx ownership transfer that may be in place here, where your role runs alongside what the NBA is going to do vis-à-vis the Timberwolves, if you've had any conversations with Alex Rodriguez or Marc Lore

and sort of the commitment to the Minneapolis market long-term?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, so as with any transaction of the transfer of ownership in any of our leagues, certainly the Timberwolves and the Lynx, Glen Taylor, Glen and Becky [Mulvihill] have been such great advocates and owners, and the Lynx have been such a successful franchise and a powerful franchise in our league, so obviously we're involved.

Obviously getting information on this unfolding story over the weekend about potential new ownership over a two to three-year period, and obviously there's league approvals that will be required on both the NBA and the WNBA side, including the NBA's Board of Governors.

Now we're getting good at it because we just did two of them in the mid-to-late winter. So yeah, we'll go through the whole process. Happy to talk with the potential new owners, but we're not quite there yet for me to be talking to them. They're still in obviously negotiation of the terms of the deal, et cetera.

So happy to certainly talk with the potential new owners about the vision of the WNBA, where we're going, where we've been, where we're going in the 25th season and the momentum, and I think there's a great story there where the Minnesota Lynx fit into that story because they've been such a successful franchise and have an outstanding leadership team and an outstanding team.

Q. I have two questions, one on the court and off the court. The WNBA was able to get some good off-court things done from a centralized location last season. How did the players continue to use their voices upon the return to markets across the nation beyond the Social Justice Council, and could you possibly shed some light on the Commissioner's Cup, which is set to make its debut this year?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yes, thank you for this question. Yeah, it was kind of interesting that you had a whole league in one place centralized last year, and I think as a result there were certainly advantages and disadvantages of that from a personal perspective. But I think the biggest advantage was all the off-court stuff where the players could gather together, whether it's just through their team or the entire league at one time, which was pretty amazing.

I think what we'd like to do this year obviously is continue to work with the Social Justice Council, but also I think the players are really looking forward to getting -- even if it's reduced fan bases -- getting back to their fan bases, getting back to their communities in which they work.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Because they don't necessarily live there in the offseason, although some do, and really getting back to engaging in youth and fan engagement, and so I think that will be important.

And I think they'll take the themes that they're going to be focused on around health equity and civic engagement and voting rights into their communities and feel a little more connected to it this year, whereas last year being in Florida in one place they might not have felt connected to the community as closely as they would have liked to.

So I think that will be an advantage this year, to get back into their local communities where they can really do community work and really feel like they're making a difference. So that's that question.

On Commissioner's Cup, yeah, we're really excited and I'll have some forthcoming details. We are going to do that in a separate release, forthcoming details around the Commissioner's Cup and how that format will work.

But we're really excited to have designated Commissioner's Cup games, which will have kind of a representation and equality theme around it. That will be activated locally in each of the 12 markets. I'll be kind of back on the road traveling to visit each market with a Commissioner's Cup game.

And then coming off the Olympic break we will have a Commissioner's Cup Final as the re-tip of the season. Again, we'll be back with more. We kind of want to get some marketing out of how cool that's going to be. You know, first year, we'll learn some things, we'll pilot some things, we'll innovate on some things, and we'll see what works so that we go into next year hopefully with full fan arenas and really engage further on.

Really looking forward to that one. So in a couple weeks a lot more will come out on the Commissioner's Cup.

Q. Obviously this is a huge year with the 25th anniversary of the WNBA, but what are some of the things that you would like to see improve as it pertains to the WNBA's marketing?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Okay, so great question because this as you know has been a big focus of mine in any season, but let alone one that has the importance of a 25th season, 25th anniversary.

I think some of the things that you've already seen, new uniforms, new ball, new logo, brand, merch, and also we're hoping to launch some second-screen experiences for fans

that won't be able to come to arenas. That will be a big part of it.

And again, because we're a player-first league, we want to make sure we're continuing to market around the players' highest priorities, and that will be in the social justice space and the health equity space.

Again, we'll have -- Commissioner's Cup will be an element. We will take that break during the Olympics, so we're going to have to really work hard to make sure the conversation [keeps going] while our Olympians, both the USAB Women's National Team going for their seventh consecutive gold as well as we will have several other Olympians for their national teams.

So keeping the conversation going during that break will be an important part, because I think when we come back we're going to have a ton of momentum, Commissioner's Cup Final, into regular-season push to the playoffs.

I think once we get to the Olympic break I think things will run quite well and we'll be able to really drive rivalries, household names, player performances. And it's in this first part of the season with the new uniforms, being back in market for the first time in a year and a half, and just continuing to capitalize on the momentum locally, in the community, with the fan base.

Q. You talked about diversity; you talked about storytelling, as well. What do you see as far as black media outlets and black-owned media outlets being 75, 80 percent plus black?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, we would love to have more coverage, and certainly we absolutely welcome that. We're also working with our teams on engaging with local black small to medium sized businesses. I know some of our teams are already doing a great job on that, but making sure that we're continuing to, because of our diversity and being 80 percent women of color, we absolutely are open and would love to talk with anyone and welcome further conversations about how to engage with the league, with the teams, with the players, because our players would be fired up and they were fired up last year when we did some things in the Bubble using black-owned businesses, and they love that we're focused on that.

It's got to be part of our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and initiatives, and you've got to walk the talk. That's what we're doing, but we would love more black media and absolutely welcome all of that.

Q. My question for you is around the broadcasts that are going to be coming up, the broadcasts now and in



the future. I understand you're not going to reveal any details at this moment, but I had two related questions, one around how you think about the trade-off more traditional cable networks, like CBS Sports Network last year versus some viewer all-digital platforms we hear discussed any time sports leagues are negotiating media rights, the pros and cons of that. And then secondly, is one of your focuses kind of negotiating these deals, sort of making it easier if you're a League Pass subscriber to be able to actually watch the games on your TV as opposed to just on digital devices such as your phone or computer. If you think about the NBA model you can subscribe through your cable provider and watch the games both by navigating to a higher number of channels as well as watching it on the computer and whether there could be an opportunity to do that going forward.

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, great question, because one of the things I did when I came into the league was to take a look at our digital platform, including League Pass and other things. So let me do your trade-off one first on the more traditional networks.

Again, we've got great partners in ESPN and CBS. We've got Twitter and Facebook Oculus. But we're definitely looking at the different digital platforms. We've got inventory, what they call inventory of games that could be carried nationally. So we're working on pulling together different packages and looking at the pros and cons of those emerging digital platforms or those that are already here.

But again, ESPN and CBS have been great partners, ESPN since the beginning, CBS more recently. And then I'm very interested in looking at our fan data, looking at how many of our fans are more digitally inclined, our digital natives who are only going to watch on a digital platform.

We've got some data on second screen and now even if a fan of watching it on television were also engaging or at games they're also engaging with their second screen, their smart device.

There are pros and cons to all of that. Your first question is a little more integrated into your second question, and we may all realize in five to 10 years we're going to be looking back and saying this is all integrated.

And I think as you look at it -- we are making upgrades to League Pass, but it's something that we're going to be really focused on, our digital platform.

By the way, I can already -- because I have Apple TV, I can already watch League Pass games through Apple TV

through the WNBA app. So there are ways even in our old League Pass format to do that.

But I will take your digital device versus can you still stream it on your TV through your cable provider back and make sure that we're building that capability if we don't have it already.

I do know as we look at our demographics of our fan base that we're going to have to have our game on all of these platforms because I think everybody wants to watch live sports from wherever they are, on the go, sitting at home, in a car, on the train, on a plane.

I mean, I actually watched the Final Four, I was on a plane coming back and I watched the Stanford Final Four game from the plane because that plane happened to have DirecTV.

So I was fortunate I was able to watch it on the plane. Again, we recognize that our fan base is going to want to take the friction out of the experience, whether it's through League Pass or on a digital device.

I've got all that on my list, and happy to share more once we continue the transformation of our digital platform.

Q. Kind of going back to expansion, obviously there's kind of two types of expansion, there would be new teams possible and then also roster expansion. I believe the NBA allows for at least 15 players per team. I was kind of wondering which type of expansion would be more likely to happen sooner, and are both of those options tied to the CBA or could you envision them expanding before the end of the 2027 season?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, so I think the roster expansion is tied to the CBA, but it's also tied to the economics and the salary cap and everything that's been negotiated. I think we're in a very good place.

But that's certainly something probably in the next CBA that could be talked about. I think we're about right sized for now for the size and scale of our game with our current rosters, and so then comparing it to the men's side is a little misleading because shorter season, fewer teams, things like that.

I think the roster expansion is probably further down the road in the next CBA, whereas on new team expansion, as I said, hopefully in the next couple years we'll be talking about the different cities where we think a WNBA team could thrive and what that would look like and how many teams we'll expand by and when.



I would think that comes before roster expansion, because, again, I think we're probably about at the right level right now.

Q. I wanted to go back a little bit to the discussion of social media and digital activation. In light of what you all are doing when it comes to Draft night and even the influence that social media had on the NCAA Tournament, what you saw from Sedona Prince on TikTok and a bunch of others, I'm wondering what you believe social media's role has been in the growing of women's basketball in the past few years?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, excellent question, I think, because if you think about even the evolving digital landscape and what's considered premium content, and it's not just gone cable networks, it's also if you think about social media and what platform the players have to go on social media.

And especially as we skew a little bit younger fans, what I call that younger social media platform like a TikTok, like an Instagram and where you see the WNBA players with the huge platforms and do very, very well as far as the number of followers and how they elevate their brand and market their brand through those platforms.

I do think that we're going to see a lot of that evolve over the next couple years. I think we've got to stay nimble and agile, and I think for a league of our size and scale, we've had the opportunity to pilot some things with our players on those platforms.

If you just look at the numbers of the growing support for the WNBA players on these platforms, we're approaching some of the other major men's professional leagues on how we show up on social. I think there's an enormous opportunity, but we'd have to then match the metrics to how those are evolving and how the influencers who then follow our players are influencing whether it's purchasing decisions, consumer decisions and things like that because that's why partners ultimately want to partner with us, to drive their business, so it's not just it's the right thing to do, but it's also a business objective for them. I know that better than anyone having come in.

I think as we think of a world in Snapchat or a world on TikTok or Instagram and how players are sharing their lives on there, I think there's enormous opportunity for us to grow and grow through sponsorship and grow through media deals because of that impact that these players are having in the social media world.

Q. This is your first time going through the Olympic break; what's kind of your opinion at this point on the

balance of it being a positive or a negative for the league? And also, you have more and more women players, current players, that are now working in broadcasting during this offseason at the local or national level. How much of a positive is that for the league?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, two great questions. Since this is my first time going through the Olympic break -- we thought we were going to have it last year and we didn't. I think there are positives and negatives. A huge positive will be hopefully the marketing element of all WNBA players going to Tokyo, bringing back hopefully that seventh consecutive gold medal, which would be a record, and also 3X3 will be an Olympic sport this year in Tokyo.

It's all in how we activate during that break and make sure the conversation is going, make sure our players who are staying back are getting some time off through the break but also are training and ready for the tip.

I think there's positives and negatives, and the positives we can amplify through strong marketing campaigns during that break.

As far as broadcast, I think the players are amazing who come into broadcasting like Candace Parker, other players who are former players like a Lisa Leslie, obviously Rebecca Lobo, Renee has been doing some things, Chiney [Ogwumike] has been doing some things. I would love to see more of it. I think we will see more of it.

I think every player has goals of theirs, and many of them want to do whether it's coaching, broadcasting, front office, et cetera, as they come off their career, and one of my big goals has been to help players position themselves for their post-playing life, because they'll have a long career, and I want them to hopefully be the next generation of leaders in business community, broadcast media.

So the next time we have to negotiate deals we've got a former player on the other side where they get it and they know the value of supporting these elite athletes.

Great question.

Q. TikTok was mentioned a few questions ago, but there's so many new fans because of what they were seeing because of inequality, and not a lot of them are big sports fans. The Draft is huge for kind of that transition from college to the WNBA, so from your perspective, what's the importance of the Draft and what's kind of the biggest thing you want to convey for those young fans just tuning in?

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, so I assume you mean fans who were fans of the women's game in college because of an association or a loyalty or a passion for their alma mater or whatever they're currently in. No doubt I identified this when we came in, we need to do a better job of kind of getting those fans because the women's game is so popular at the NCAA level.

I was in some markets pre-COVID where the women's game is out-drawing the men's by far. We need to do a better job of making sure we bring that fan in who was tied to the passion for the university or college into our game and have them follow those players that they were so passionate about that were at their alma mater.

And also I think there's just a narrative out there as to whether it's a female fan or a male fan, supporting this game and supporting the eliteness because we know the quality of the game is amazing, that once we bring a fan in, the fan stays. It's finding the right narrative, having the right marketing, building these household names and these rivalries, and the content, everybody wants compelling content that's so compelling that they want to watch whether they're a sports fan or not.

I do think the social justice platform of the WNBA players has helped bring in a different level of fan into our game that doesn't watch the men's game or doesn't watch different sports, but they know what the WNBA players accomplished last year, and they're still following them, and we see that in our fan data. We need to make sure that we're keeping that fan, and as we tip the season, we're drawing them in and our marketing is heavily strategic in drawing them in and keeping them as fans, and again, building their loyalty to a team, a player, a rivalry.

Q. I wanted to talk to you about the new ownership group that Renee Montgomery, former WNBA player, was a part of for the Atlanta Dream. Given what happened with Atlanta and really the state of Georgia this past year, there was a lot of negativity just surrounding that. I don't want to get into all of that, but how much of that was just a positive storyline, not just for the league but for the state of Georgia and really society as a whole? I just wanted to get your take on that. And also to implement the aspect of diversity that you've been talking about so much on this call.

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yeah, I think it's a huge role model moment for Renee, who I think this really catapulted her into a true role model for future generations and current generations to really aspire to because I always say you need to have something to aspire to, and I think having Renee as an owner with Larry and Suzanne is huge.

I just think it's hopefully going to help, and I know it's already helping the community engagement, the process in Atlanta, the advocacy for the Dream. I think it's really changed the way that team is going to transform, and I think it has a ton of talent anyway, but I think having Renee involved and having new ownership in there is really going to change the narrative on the support in the local community for the Atlanta Dream.

I'm constantly talking with the new owners, including Renee, and she's just -- they love her already, and she is already working so great on behalf of building the franchise into a winner, and I'm really proud that Renee has stepped fresh off of retirement and now is building another level of expertise to bring what we knew was already a strong work ethic and knowledge and understanding of business.

And by the way, she's a great marketer, and I didn't know that. From a player perspective, that's great to see, as well. I think Atlanta is really going to benefit from her involvement and her ownership and her leadership.

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